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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**Towards a Concrete Art
A Practice-Led Investigation**

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Towards a Concrete Art: A Practice-Led Investigation

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PhD Fine Art, (Full-time).

**Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design
University of Dundee**

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Geoff Lucas



Boyle Family: *Loch Ruthven*, 2010
Installation view

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| List of Illustrations | 10 |
| Abstract | 15 |
| Foreword and note on the usage of terms in this thesis | 16 |
| | |
| 0.1 Introduction/Contextual review | 24 |
| 0.11 Origins of the project | 24 |
| 0.12 Ideas forming from a reflection on the arrangement of allotment plots | 26 |
| 0.13 A possible relation of the Intuitive and Rational | 30 |
| 0.14 A possible paradoxical relation between Art and Objecthood | 33 |
| 0.15 The beginnings of curatorial procedures as practice | 37 |
| 0.16 Our move to the Highlands and the establishing of HICA | 39 |
| 0.17 The relation of HICA to other art activities in the Highlands | 41 |
| 0.18 The formulation of the experiment of HICA | 47 |
| 0.19 The initial devising of HICA's programme | 52 |
| | |
| 0.2 A Note on the Name | 54 |
| 0.21 First ideas: reasons for using the word 'institute' | 54 |
| 0.22 The impulse towards research: the project's situating in relation to areas of concern | 55 |
| 0.23 Why 'The Highland Institute for <i>Contemporary</i> Art'? | 58 |
| 0.24 HICA's local political context, and our finding ways to proceed... | 62 |
| | |
| 1 Concrete Now! | 67 |
| 1.1 HICA's opening exhibition: <i>Concrete Now!</i> 24 August – 28 September, 2008 | 67 |
| 1.11 Exhibition texts | 68 |
| 1.12 Note on the remainder of the text, and consideration of exhibitions | 76 |
| 1.2 Exchange of exhibitions between HICA and PS: | |
| <i>Concrete Now! Introducing PS, 23 August – 27 September 2009</i> | |
| <i>HICA, as arranged, 17 January – 28 February, 2010</i> | 78 |
| 1.21 The relation of the HICA project to the tradition of Concrete Art | 78 |
| 1.22 A brief sketch of an accepted history of Concrete Art | 80 |
| 1.23 Some current activity; possible positioning of artists shown by PS | 86 |
| 1.3 HICA Exhibition: Peter Suchin: <i>The Grey Planets</i>, 26 October–30 November 2008 | 91 |
| 1.31 The origins of a modern approach to painting: Suchin's relation to the 'concrete' | 91 |
| 1.32 A dialogue with materials and form | 94 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1.33 Can this dialogue operate without representational elements? | 96 |
| 1.4 HICA Exhibition: Richard Couzins: <i>Free Speech Bubble</i> , 1 March–5 April 2009 | 98 |
| 1.41 Questioning the location of meaning | 98 |
| 1.42 Sign and signified; 'outer' and 'inner'? | 100 |
| 1.43 Developing Symbolist strategies | 102 |
| 1.44 Paintings as objects? | 109 |
| 1.5 HICA Exhibition: Alec Finlay and Alexander and Susan Maris: | |
| <i>You'll have had your tea? 3 May – 7 June 2009</i> | 113 |
| 1.51 Innovations through text and collage | 113 |
| 1.52 A new constructive sculptural tradition: real space and the temporal | 119 |
| 1.53 Complexities of meaning: works located in the here and now | 123 |
| 1.6 HICA exhibition: David Bellingham: <i>40w 60w 100w</i>, 28 June – 2 August 2009 | 125 |
| 1.61 Encountering difficulties: representation, complexity: the high- to post- modern | 125 |
| 1.62 A point of resulting malaise? | 127 |
| 1.63 Alternative 'concrete' developments: possible responses to the high- to post-modern | 130 |
| 1.64 The role of irrationality in alternative concrete approaches | 132 |
| 1.7 Point of Reflection: an observed continuing sense of malaise; its historic roots | 135 |
| | |
| 2 The Nature Of Process | 137 |
| 2.1 An introduction to the themes of this chapter: the potential for artworks to affect change; consideration of chance and the 'irrational' within processes of change; a further exploration of art's relation to science. | 137 |
| 2.2 HICA exhibition: Jeremy Millar 2 May – 6 June, 2010 | 139 |
| 2.21 Mystic or Rationalist? | 139 |
| 2.22 The irrational as part of the material? Interventions of consciousness | 141 |
| 2.23 Chance within complexity, developing possibility | 146 |
| 2.24 Arp, and a further conception of a 'concrete' art | 147 |
| 2.3 Consideration in relation to the work of Theo van Doesburg of exhibitions at HICA by Thomson and Craighead (20 June – 25 July, 2010), Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum (18 September – 10 October, 2010), and also including The Great Glen Artists' Airshow (18 and 19 September, 2010) | 148 |
| 2.31 A Constructivist relation to science | 148 |
| 2.32 Relevance of Plato or Hegel?; the 'real' and the development of 'plastic means' | 149 |
| 2.33 A questioning of the Rational and Intuitive | 153 |
| 2.34 The concrete and non-transcendence: the implying of reasoned empirical knowledge | 156 |
| 2.35 A move toward Relational understandings | 158 |
| 2.36 The Relational: necessarily, but materially, representational? | 159 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 2.37 | Reflection on works exhibited at HICA | 161 |
| 2.4 | HICA exhibition: Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum, <AbstractView> 18 September – 10 October 2010 | 162 |
| 2.41 | empirical geometry | 162 |
| 2.5 | HICA exhibition: Thomson + Craighead, 20 June – 25 July 2010 | 165 |
| 2.51 | A gaining of 'real' perspective? | 165 |
| 2.6 | A reflection on the similarities and differences of approach between these artists' works, and Van Doesburg's: concrete rules, plastic means, 'chance' and efforts toward a science of art-making | 169 |
| 2.7 | Theo van Doesburg's <i>Manifesto for Concrete Art</i> | 172 |
| 2.71 | A structure of oppositions; in works and methods; between Realism and Nominalism | 175 |
| 2.72 | Possible interpretations of LeWitt's positioning | 179 |
| 2.73 | Oppositions and a need for 'activity': works' concrete effects as part of lived processes | 180 |
| 2.8 | HICA exhibition: Boyle Family: <i>Loch Ruthven</i>, 24 October – 28 November 2010 | 183 |
| 2.81 | A summary of points in relation to Boyle Family's works | 183 |
| 2.82 | The concrete and Nature: the possibility of 'chance', and an acceptance of complexity | 185 |
| 2.83 | Engagement with given conditions: involvement in the zeitgeist | 187 |
| 2.84 | A structure of oppositions as manifested in the presence of the author | 188 |
| 2.85 | Boyle Family's installation: the HICA space and view: a reflection on windows... | 191 |
| 2.86 | ...and our presence in the drama | 193 |
| 2.87 | A process of nature, and our active involvement; an 'altering of life-space' | 195 |
| 3 | Concrete Vernacular | 198 |
| 3.1 | Reflection on the previous, and introduction to this chapter: reconsidering order and rationality; our subject/object relations | 198 |
| 3.2 | HICA exhibition: Richard Roth: <i>Vernacular Modernism</i> 1 May – 5 June 2011 | 199 |
| 3.21 | The development of <i>Vernacular Modernism</i> : dialogue between the local and universal | 199 |
| 3.22 | Roth's Minimalist positioning: Nominalist or Realist? | 201 |
| 3.23 | Things' conformity with their place in nature: active forms within an active background | 206 |
| 3.24 | Spatial organisation | 207 |
| 3.3 | HICA exhibition: <i>Grow Together: Concrete Poetry in Brazil and Scotland</i> 3 July – 7 August 2011 | 209 |
| 3.31 | Origins of a 'concrete' poetry | 209 |
| 3.32 | Tension: things-words in space-time | 212 |
| 3.33 | The verbivocovisual as forming and formed, and as means for change | 213 |
| 3.34 | Physical constraints: solely determining the process? | 216 |
| 3.35 | Posing the question of intentionality; the dilemma of our subject/object relations | 221 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 3.36 | The example of the works of Geraldo de Barros as a presentation of this dilemma | 224 |
| 3.37 | Nature as this struggle? | 227 |
| 3.4 | HICA and grey) (area exhibition: <i>Concretely Immaterial</i>, 25 July – 11 September 2011 | 230 |
| 3.41 | The origins of the <i>Concretely Immaterial</i> project; considering the extent of the 'concrete' | 230 |
| 3.42 | The concrete and conceptual: moving from a rational 'conceptual', toward Nature | 232 |
| 3.43 | Examples of exhibited works; their 'natural' relation and engagement of constraints | 235 |
| 3.44 | The conceptual as material? Pursuing the logic of a more overt monist identification | 240 |
| 3.5 | HICA exhibition: Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen: <i>Loss Becomes Object</i> 24 September – 30 October 2011 | 244 |
| 3.51 | Subjectivity: isolated and anthropocentric or 'plural and polyphonic'? | 244 |
| 3.52 | Intervening in the 'discursive flow' | 247 |
| 3.53 | Considering the employing of objects within the process of the 'discursive flow' | 249 |
| 3.54 | Between the artist and artwork: a further structure of oppositions | 253 |
| 3.55 | A consistent problem: the questioning of Spinoza's Realist/Nominalist alignment | 253 |
| 4 | The Problem Of Form | 258 |
| 4.1 | Outline of the themes of this chapter: considering the limits of the concrete, and the relation of consciousness to the concrete; reflecting on the differentiation of forms within general aesthetic experience | 258 |
| 4.2 | HICA exhibition: Doug Fishbone: <i>Neither Here nor There</i>, 1 April – 6 May 2012 | 260 |
| 4.21 | Questioning Conceptual Art's definitions and 'dematerialization' | 260 |
| 4.22 | Fishbone's alignment: degrees of conceptual content, and the means of its location | 265 |
| 4.23 | Our unwitting involvements within a bigger picture | 271 |
| 4.3 | HICA exhibition: Eloi Puig: <i>Simultaneous Translation/Traducció Simultània</i> 8 July – 12 August 2012 | 272 |
| 4.31 | Concurrent relations, and forms of translation | 272 |
| 4.32 | Understanding form as content: overlapping contents of 'dispersed' forms: composite entities and environmental meanings | 276 |
| 4.33 | More closely identifying two observed processes here: | 278 |
| 4.331 | The Phenotypical | 278 |
| 4.332 | The encountering of forms as totalities | 280 |
| 4.34 | The aesthetic negotiation of the world, and a route to its understanding | 281 |
| 4.35 | Consequent, further considerations of the relation of consciousness and the physical | 283 |
| 4.4 | HICA exhibition: Daniel Spoerri: <i>Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri</i> 2 September – 7 October 2012 | 285 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 4.41 | To confront the material, and to ‘un-trick’ the eye: the practical, and our constant immersion in profoundly qualified space | 285 |
| 4.42 | Concurrency indicating against individual intentionality: another take on the concrete and conceptual: concepts as ‘real’ | 291 |
| 4.43 | Proposing the ‘instinctive’ over the ‘intuitive’ | 295 |
| 4.44 | The actualising of concrete content: the problem of differentiation | 298 |
| 4.45 | Of form, and between forms and thought: the ‘dance of the mind’ | 299 |
| 4.5 | HICA exhibition: Camila Sposati: <i>Green-Dyed Vulture</i> | |
| | 14 October – 18 November 2012 | 303 |
| 4.51 | The static and dynamic; a reflection on Hegel: a development indicated by Sposati | 303 |
| 4.52 | Manifesting environmental concrete content? | 307 |
| 4.53 | A critical reflection on Neo-Concretism | 311 |
| 4.54 | Intending beyond ‘classical’ understandings | 314 |
| 4.55 | Questions developed by a state of paradox | 320 |
| 5 | Towards A Quancrete Art | 323 |
| 5.1 | Reviewing HICA’s programmes and the discussion in the corresponding chapters of this text | 323 |
| 5.2 | HICA residency and exhibition project: Liam Gillick: <i>From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections</i> | |
| | 14 April – 6 October 2013 (exhibition 1 September – 6 October) | 325 |
| 5.21 | Discussion of the works and project | 325 |
| 5.3 | A quancrete proposal | 332 |
| 5.31 | Relation of quancrete to quantum | 333 |
| 5.4 | Reflections on the results from ‘two-slit’ experiments | 334 |
| 5.41 | Differing interpretations: Copenhagen and de Broglie-Bohm | 338 |
| 5.42 | Decoherence | 345 |
| 5.43 | The nature of substance | 350 |
| 5.5 | Dual natures within overall unity | 356 |
| 5.6 | The nature of quancrete reconciliation | 357 |
| 5.7 | Becoming actuality | 365 |
| 6 | A provisional presentation of conclusions | 369 |

| | | |
|---------------------|---|-----|
| Appendix A: | HICA exhibition press releases, arranged chronologically: 2008 - 2013 | 375 |
| Appendix B: | | 399 |
| B.1 | Augusto de Campos: interview questions and response | 400 |
| B.2 | Documents forwarded by Augusto de Campos: First letters between Augusto de Campos, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Mary Ellen Solt. | 405 |
| B.3 | Manifesto for Concrete Poetry (1956) | 410 |
| Bibliography | | 412 |
| | Appendix C: (boxed separately, with hardbound copy of thesis) | |
| | Cover note | |
| | HICA archive materials, 2008-2013: | |
| | Exhibition cards (x21) | |
| | Publications: | |
| | <i>Four Exhibitions: October 2008 - August 2009</i> | |
| | <i>Exhibitions 2010</i> | |
| | <i>Exhibitions 2011</i> | |
| | <i>Exhibitions 2012</i> | |
| | Liam Gillick: <i>From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections</i> | |

List of illustrations

| | |
|--|-----|
| Boyle Family: <i>Loch Ruthven</i> , 2010. Installation view | 3 |
| View of HICA | 24 |
| Naum Gabo, <i>Linear Construction in Space No.2</i> , 1957-58 | 26 |
| Eric Gill, <i>Ecstasy</i> , 1910-11 | 26 |
| Photo of our allotment in London, and of our current veg patch | 30 |
| <i>Diagrammatic presentation of Plato's The Divided Line</i> | 32 |
| Construction of the initial HICA space, 2008 | 66 |
| David Bellingham, <i>Dipped Rules</i> , 2008 | 69 |
| Richard Couzins, Stills from <i>Unovercryable</i> , 2008 | 70 |
| Alec Finlay, <i>Narrow and Crimson (5)</i> , 2008 | 72 |
| Peter Suchin, <i>Museum of the Vexed Text (Eight-card Extract)</i> , 2008 | 73 |
| Chris Tomic, <i>Untitled Logical Forms</i> , 2008 | 74 |
| Michelle Grabner, <i>Untitled</i> , 2006 | 89 |
| John Nixon, <i>Untitled</i> , 2008 | 90 |
| Jan van der Ploeg, <i>Untitled</i> , 2008 | 90 |
| Peter Suchin, <i>An Endless Loop of Death</i> , 2003 | 93 |
| Howard Hodgkin, <i>Mr and Mrs James Kirkman</i> , 1980-84 | 93 |
| Peter Suchin, <i>In Castorp's Castle</i> , 2001 | 96 |
| Edouard Manet, <i>View from a Café on the Place du Théâtre Français</i> , 1881 | 98 |
| Richard Couzins, stills from <i>Free Speech Bubble</i> , 2009 | 100 |
| Richard Couzins, <i>Free Speech Bubble</i> , wall poster, 2009 | 101 |
| Gustave Moreau, <i>Oedipe Voyageur (L'Egalité devant la mort)</i> , c.1888 | 103 |
| Elihu Vedder, <i>Memory</i> , 1870 | 104 |
| Odilon Redon, <i>The Day</i> , 1891 | 106 |
| James Abbott McNeill Whistler, <i>Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea</i> , 1871 | 106 |
| Stéphane Mallarmé, extract from <i>Un Coup de Dés</i> , 1897 | 108 |
| François Kupka, <i>Fugue à deux couleurs et pour Amorpha, chromatique chaude</i> , 1911 | 109 |
| Richard Couzins, Installation view, <i>Free Speech Bubble</i> , 2009 | 110 |
| Richard Couzins, Installation view, <i>Free Speech Bubble</i> , 2009 | 111 |
| Alec Finlay, with Caroline Smith, <i>mesostic jam & jelly</i> , 2008-2009 | 113 |
| Alec Finlay, <i>tea-moon</i> , 2007-2009 | 114 |
| Alexander and Susan Maris, <i>Kettle from Heather Tea on Rannoch Moor</i> , 2005 (ongoing) | 115 |
| Alec Finlay, <i>Beyond Mountains (detail)</i> , 2009 | 115 |
| Gino Severini, <i>Still Life with the Newspaper 'Lacerba'</i> , 1913 | 116 |
| Juan Gris, <i>Bottle of Rosé Wine</i> , 1914 | 118 |
| Aleksandr Rodchenko, <i>Spatial Construction</i> , 1921 | 119 |
| Aleksandr Rodchenko, <i>Spatial Construction/Spatial Object</i> , 1921 | 119 |
| Vladimir Tatlin, <i>Corner Counter-Relief</i> , 1914-15 | 120 |
| Alexander and Susan Maris, still from <i>Heather Tea on Rannoch Moor</i> | 124 |
| David Bellingham, <i>365 Days</i> , Installation view, 2009 | 128 |
| David Bellingham, <i>90 degrees</i> , 2009 | 129 |
| David Bellingham, <i>sloping to a thin edge</i> , 2009 | 129 |
| David Bellingham, <i>powder paint espresso</i> , 2008 | 131 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| David Bellingham, <i>40w 60w 100w</i> , 2008 | 133 |
| The conversion of the larger gallery space at HICA, Spring 2010 | 136 |
| Jeremy Millar, Installation view with <i>Mirror of Ink</i> , 2010 | 141 |
| Jeremy Millar, <i>Neutral (diluted)</i> , 2007-ongoing | 144 |
| Jeremy Millar, stills from <i>Preparations</i> , 2010 | 145 |
| Theo van Doesburg, <i>Graph of the development from perspective illusionism towards the plane (F) and onward to the creation of new realms</i> , 1929-30 | 151 |
| Theo van Doesburg and Cornelius van Eesteren, <i>Elevations and axonometric drawing of the private house</i> , 1923 | 153 |
| Camila Sposati, <i>Yellow Vanishing Points</i> , 2010 | 154 |
| Esther Polak, <i>Nomadic Milk</i> project, Nigeria, 2009 | 163 |
| Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum, <i>Cattle Grid</i> , 2010 | 163 |
| Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum, <i>Loch Drawing Wind</i> , 2010 | 164 |
| Thomson + Craighead, <i>The End</i> , 2010 | 166 |
| Thomson + Craighead, <i>Horizon</i> , 2009 | 167 |
| Theo van Doesburg, Otto Carlsund, Jean Hélion, Léon Tutundjian, Marcel Wantz (eds.), <i>Art Concret no.1</i> , 1930 | 173 |
| Theo van Doesburg, <i>Arithmetic Composition</i> , 1929-30 | 174 |
| Sol LeWitt, <i>Serial Project No.1 (ABCD)</i> , 1966 | 176 |
| Portrait of I.K. Bonset (Nelly van Doesburg in disguise), c.1927 | 178 |
| Thomson + Craighead, still from <i>The Time Machine in Alphabetical Order</i> , 2010 | 182 |
| Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum, <i>Wall Drawing Wind</i> , 2010 | 182 |
| Boyle Family, <i>Study from the New Town Series with Concrete Gutter and Embedded Stones</i> , 1988 | 184 |
| Boyle Family, <i>Loch Ruthven</i> , installation view, 2010 | 191 |
| Boyle Family, <i>Loch Ruthven</i> , installation views, 2010 | 192 |
| Richard Roth, <i>Vernacular Modernism: Colour Chart</i> | 203 |
| Richard Roth, <i>Vernacular Modernism: Business Forms</i> | 204 |
| Richard Roth, <i>Vernacular Modernism: Colour Chart</i> | 205 |
| Richard Roth, <i>Vernacular Modernism: Compacts</i> | 205 |
| I.K. Bonset (Theo van Doesburg) (ed.), <i>Mécano no. Yellow</i> , 1922 | 211 |
| Augusto de Campos, <i>Tensão</i> , 1956 | 212 |
| Décio Pignatari, <i>Terra</i> , 1956 | 216 |
| Table showing the five regular polyhedrons (from Stevens) | 218 |
| Scottish Neolithic 'Platonic Solids' | 219 |
| The fourteen semi-regular polyhedrons | 220 |
| The three regular and eight semi-regular two-dimensional mosaics (from Stevens) | 220 |
| Geraldo de Barros, <i>Untitled</i> , 1953 | 225 |
| Geraldo de Barros, <i>Unilabor Chair</i> , 1954 | 225 |
| Hobjeto store-front, São Paulo, ca. 1987 | 226 |
| Haroldo de Campos, <i>Cristal Forma</i> , 1958 | 228 |
| Nina Czegledy and Marcus Neustetter, <i>Visual Collider</i> , 2009 (detail) | 236 |
| Nina Czegledy and Marcus Neustetter, <i>Visual Collider Diagram</i> , 2009 | 236 |
| Darko Fritz, <i>204_NO_CONTENT</i> , 2007 | 237 |
| Darko Fritz, <i>204_NO_CONTENT</i> , 2007 (detail view) | 237 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Goran Trbuljak, <i>Old and depressive anonymous is looking for a permanent display place in some nice new art museum space</i> | 239 |
| Andreja Kulunčić, <i>Commercialization of the History</i> , 2010 | 239 |
| Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, <i>Loss Becomes Object</i> , Installation view, 2011 | 250 |
| Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, <i>Forces of Attraction and Repulsion</i> (detail), 2011 | 251 |
| Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, <i>Life is Short, Art Long</i> (detail), 2011 | 251 |
| Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, still from <i>No Neutral Presentations</i> , 2011 | 253 |
| Robert Barry, <i>Inert Gas Series: Argon; From a Measured Volume to Indefinite Expansion</i> , 1969 | 264 |
| Doug Fishbone, stills from <i>Untitled (Hypno Project)</i> , 2009 | 265 |
| Doug Fishbone, <i>Elmina</i> film poster, 2010 | 267 |
| Doug Fishbone, stills from <i>Elmina</i> , 2010 | 269 |
| Eloi Puig, <i>Geolocation Reading</i> | 274 |
| Eloi Puig, <i>Fine Line Between HICA and Hangar</i> | 275 |
| Eloi Puig, <i>Series Geo-Colour</i> | 275 |
| Eloi Puig, <i>Renga Word Map, HICA: Rondalla De l'Assimila</i> | 277 |
| Daniel Spoerri, <i>Restaurant de la Galerie J, Paris</i> , 1962 | 286 |
| Daniel Spoerri, <i>Konkrete Poesie</i> , 1956 | 286 |
| Daniel Spoerri, objects from Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri, selected for HICA | 289 |
| Daniel Spoerri, Spoerri at work in his hotel room in Paris, film still | 291 |
| Daniel Spoerri, <i>Chambre No.13</i> , 1998 | 291 |
| Daniel Spoerri, spectacles with needles, 1960-61 | 295 |
| Daniel Spoerri, <i>The Topographical Map of Chance</i> , 1961 | 301 |
| Daniel Spoerri, Excerpt from <i>An Anecdoted Topography of Chance</i> , published 1966 | 301 |
| Camila Sposati, <i>Layer in Earth and Crystal</i> , 2012 | 306 |
| Camila Sposati, <i>Highlands (Rainbow)</i> , 2012 | 307 |
| Camila Sposati, still from <i>Darvaza</i> , 2012 | 308 |
| Camila Sposati, <i>Unlock</i> , 2012 | 309 |
| Camila Sposati, <i>Yellow Vanishing Points</i> , 2010 | 310 |
| Liam Gillick and Henry Bond, <i>25 April 1991, London England, 17.00, Reception to Launch Super-Commuter, Fred Finn's Ten Million Mile Trip. Roof Gardens, Kensington</i> , 1991 | 326 |
| Liam Gillick, <i>(The What If? Scenario) Second Stage Discussion Platform and Surface Designs</i> , 1996 | 327 |
| Liam Gillick, <i>From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections</i> , installation view, 2013 | 329 |
| Liam Gillick, <i>From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections</i> , drawings (details), 2013 | 330 |
| Illustration of a two-slit experiment | 335 |
| Illustration of a two-slit experiment with a detector | 337 |
| Liam Gillick, <i>Benched Discussion</i> , 2009 | 359 |
| Liam Gillick, <i>Home Office London</i> , Marsham Street, London, 2002-2005 | 360 |
| Liam Gillick, <i>The Horizon Produced by a Factory once It Had Stopped Producing Views</i> , The Wright Restaurant, Guggenheim, New York, 2009 | 360 |

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Images of artworks used here alongside the text, also used in HICA publications, have been credited in those publications, as appropriate. Mention should perhaps be further made here crediting images as follows:

Daniel Spoerri, *Chambre No.13*, 1998, on p.291, photo by Birgit Neumann
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Declaration

I wish to declare that I, Geoff Lucas, am the author of this thesis, and that all references cited have been consulted by myself. The work of which the thesis is a record has been carried out solely by myself, as additional activity to other collaborative practice including the joint running of the HICA art-space. This work has not previously been accepted for a higher degree.

Abstract

This study aims to identify a consistent position for Concrete Art, relevant to an understanding of, and highlighting its vital importance in, contemporary practice.

As a practice-led study, its primary research methods have drawn upon the curating of series' of exhibitions, hosting of discussions and production of publications at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art (HICA: www.h-i-c-a.org). HICA is an artist-run space that I co-founded in 2008. Its exhibitions are particular examples of relevant practice and vehicles for the further exploration of ideas. They have included artists such as Boyle Family, the Noigandres poets, Daniel Spoerri, and Liam Gillick.

The diversity of understandings, artistically and philosophically, of the 'concrete' reveal the contradictory states a concrete art may be desired to occupy. Theo van Doesburg's *Manifesto for Concrete Art*, of 1930, for example, appears to call for both opposite Realist/universal and Nominalist/particular understandings of artworks. Van Doesburg's seems a monist position overall though, uniting contradictory elements as counterparts or 'contrasts'; a position which, by extension, may better define the intentions of a general 'concrete' tendency apparent throughout modern art.

Exploring relevant developments from the beginnings of modernism as the background to contemporary artists' considerations of the concrete, the study reflects on how such phenomena as the universal and particular, form and content, or mind and matter, may currently be understood as unified, and as material. These considerations readily connect thinking in relation to Concrete Art to a shift in understanding from classical to modern physics.

The study, developing a resulting focus on our general aesthetic experience, as our part in pervasive formative processes, concludes with a proposal of a new term; the 'quancrete', which aims to provide a contemporary sense of the concrete, consistent with these new understandings, and indicative of an on-going development, basic to ideas of modernism; connecting both its earliest experiments and its current diversity.

Foreword and note on the usage of terms in this thesis

Raymond Williams' discussion of 'Realism', in *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, points up the term's problematic relations to understandings of the 'real' through its various usages. 'Realism' itself, Williams notes, was a new word in the Nineteenth Century, of which he discerns four primary meanings:¹

- i to describe philosophical Realism
- ii 'as a term to describe the physical world as independent of mind or spirit, in this sense sometimes interchangeable with Naturalism or Materialism'
- iii 'as a description of facing up to things as they really are, and not as we imagine or would like them to be...'
- iv 'as a term to describe a method or an attitude in art and literature – at first an exceptional accuracy of representation, later a commitment to describing real events and showing things as they actually exist.'

This study, *Towards a Concrete Art: A Practice-Led Investigation* took efforts towards an understanding of the 'real' as a basic pursuit, especially of the 'modern' era (from mid-Nineteenth Century).² It suggested and explored this basis to modern art as, in connection with rapidly developing science, its striving towards a *concrete* art, though reflected that the routes taken in this are as various as those mentioned by Williams;³ '... it can be seen that there is almost endless play in the word. A Realist in the pre-C18 sense of the word took real in the general sense of an underlying truth or quality; in the post-eC19 sense in the (often opposed) sense of concrete (as from C14 opposed to abstract) existence.'

The 'real' may be the subject of discussion, but how to approach this? Does even the effort to achieve a greater Realism reveal our forever being at some essential distance from it, necessarily caught-up in the imaginary and illusory?

1 R. Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, p.217

2 Greenberg comments in *Avant-garde and Kitsch*, for instance, considering the development of the avant-garde from the middle of the Nineteenth Century: 'It was no accident... that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically – and geographically too – with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe.' J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.7

3 R. Williams, op. cit. p.217

Other terms relevant to a modern inquiry into the real have similarly come under scrutiny: I have aimed to distinguish my arguments through consideration of how they may be applied or their sense adapted. I give some examples here, to indicate the approach I have taken in this written thesis and facilitate understanding for the reader, though this reconsidering has been an aspect of the practice of the study as a whole.

'Universal'

In regard to the term 'universal', for instance: the presumed universal comprehensibility of formal elements in modern artworks may be related to philosophical Realism, suggesting an order of 'true' knowledge, that may consequently enable a more scientific treatment of art-making. Though I present differing usages to develop my argument: this Realist conception alongside, for example, the 'concrete universality' of Hegel (the universal as something united with the particular in the immediate realisation of the Idea⁴), to enable reflection, building toward a shift of meaning; in this case, from something transcendent to something immanent; significantly inverting the universal's more usual, Realist, understanding.

This inversion is key in developing other elements within this discussion: an absence of transcendent meaning, and therefore also of this 'true' knowledge, has consequences for ideas of the rational and intuitive which various traditions of Concrete Art may be seen as reliant upon. The rational and intuitive are instead here implied as varieties of the same, rather than different orders of knowledge: all knowledge may then be argued as developing from basic practical involvement in the world. Dilemmas stemming from perceptions of things existing within equivalent separate orders, i.e. mind and body, constructed culture and the material base, the psychological or physiological orientation of artworks, or the question of our subject/object relations overall, may then be similarly rethought; as integrated; as forms differentiated from within a unity.

This immanence denies the universal any absolute meaning: it ties-it-in to the immediate and local, perhaps limiting its applicability to 'all persons or things in

4 See for instance Michael Inwood's Introduction to G.W.F., Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, p.xxi

the world'.⁵ But my argument also reconsiders this now relativistic understanding, most pointedly through the example of artists and groups who may be working in more remote or peripheral cultural or geographic positions. As practice related to and reflecting on the 'remote' and 'peripheral' activities of the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art (www.h-i-c-a.org) an artist-run space in the Highlands of Scotland, established in 2008 by myself and Eilidh Crumlish,⁶ the study in some ways becomes a means for examining this central concern: HICA's own form, and focus on the Concrete, presents a questioning in-itself of whether universal meanings may effectively be reasserted. That is, the ideas HICA explores develop through the observation of a now immanent order; of forms, stable enough, given the scales of time and space, to be taken as inherent in Nature; thus presenting a further moment of potential for a, qualified, 'true' knowledge, that may be open to being affirmed, in this revised way, as something still Concrete.

This raises the question again of these meanings' availability to scientific treatment. The study here reflects on how ideas of science have fundamentally shifted through the last century, such that we may now understand any such knowledge to be at some essential distance from what could be described as 'objective': while our conception of science has had to be radically altered, the minute scales and immense complexity recognised by modern physics perhaps equally make these meanings forever beyond its reach.

Leaving this question open, this study still thus seeks a way of seeing the universal, and ultimately intends its application to mean, something, to all intents and purposes, 'applicable to all cases', which may still act as some (formal, cultural, ethical) measure to the arbitrary and relative, despite its being consciously 'ungraspable' and in accord with new understandings of science. Through this intention, it opens the discussion of the universal up beyond our human spheres, such that aesthetic responses, for example, may be considered in relation to other species, other forms of life or cognitive presences. This line of inquiry is pursued primarily through a consideration of physics and the nature of space.

5 J. Pearsall & B. Trumble, (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, p.1577: Universal: 'Of, belonging to, or done etc. by all persons or things in the world or in the class concerned; applicable to all cases...'

6 The use of 'HICA' through the rest of this text indicates the project as jointly developed by myself and Eilidh Crumlish

'Space'

'Space' then is here a further term, allied to the universal, where a shift in meaning may lead to a revised idea of the Concrete. In-line with modern physics, '...our common-sense idea that space is a big nothing has been replaced with the more sophisticated thought that space is a big everything',⁷ and again the argument I develop through this text explores ways that the view, taken to originate with Democritus, of reality consisting of "atomic building blocks" in a void, may be replaced by a sense of, in Bohm's description, 'undivided wholeness':

A centrally relevant change in descriptive order required in the quantum theory is thus the dropping of the notion of analysis of the world into relatively autonomous parts, separately existent but in interaction. Rather, the primary emphasis is now on undivided wholeness, in which the observing instrument is not separable from what is observed.⁸

'Objective' and 'Neutral'

Consequent to this insight, the 'objective' and 'neutral', two further terms significant in orthodox modernist accounts, see their meanings unravel. What can these mean when nothing exists in a vacuum; when the world is no longer comprised of separate entities, but is rather a profoundly complex totality, of which we are part?

This impossibility of separation, a necessity, it would seem, for analysis, becomes notable in the methodologies of the inquiry, as well as in the argument itself.

Yet this new awareness develops from discoveries at the microscopic scale. Following Heisenberg's observations,⁹ our Classical understandings are still useful and basically correct at our scale, and are, due to our nature as macroscopic beings, actually, for us, inescapable: a state that permits a practical consideration, and a, qualified, analysis. Thus while accepting the impossibility of a term such as 'neutral' in its intended modern usage, I have developed my argument through reference to this, as a still useful idea of an impartiality¹⁰ (of an exhibition space, for example). There is then, throughout this text, a consideration between our

7 P. S. Stevens, *Patterns in Nature*, p.6

8 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.11

9 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, pp.22-23

10 J. Pearsall & B. Trumble, (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, p.975. Neutral: 'Impartial. Indistinct, vague, indeterminate.'

dualistic and contradictory experience due to our inevitable Classical awareness, and our knowledge of a unified state, revealed at microscopic scales, that we understand to be more 'correct'. These Classical contradictions I have judged to still provide basic coordinates for living, coordinates that persist for us despite our knowledge to the contrary; as we still inevitably differentiate separate forms out of this totality in negotiating the world. Indeed, as will later be noted, various aspects of the HICA project were developed specifically to engage a sense of these contradictions as still a 'structure of oppositions', present, among other things, in understandings of the artworks under consideration. For example, I later discuss these oppositions through making an analogy to sight (in reflecting on notions of 'authorship'¹¹): that they may be seen individually or together, as we may look through one eye at a time, or know that normal sight is maintained by both eyes seeing together in parallel. Significantly, seeing with both eyes is in order to gain perspective. That is, I argue that something may still be usefully seen in isolation, as 'neutral', or in a contextual way, though that both views together may aid our judgement, at our scale of living, through providing perspective and thus enabling a relational understanding.

These considerations are examples, part of the focus for HICA's inquiries, forming a re-examination of ideas of Concrete Art; a reflection on how the history of these ideas influences contemporary art, that asks whether contemporary art may then be characterised as still engaged in the pursuit of the real? If the meanings of terms such as those I have noted here can find fresh application in contemporary art, then the contemporary may be judged a direct extension of modern practice. This perspective further calls into question the definitions of both the modern and contemporary, suggesting a trajectory toward greater knowledge of the Concrete as the origin and continuing development of modernism, that may, at the point we are now, still indicate and inform possible future directions.

The form of the HICA project (the running of the gallery), largely evolved as a means to engage these concerns and reflect on the relation of artwork, context, and understanding: as a fitting methodology, presuming an immanent nature; something that would provide 'concrete' results through which to observe and demonstrate our interactions with the 'real'; something that might stand in this way as a Relational artwork in its own right.

This practice-led study has formed a further and more particular layer of activity, focussing and developing this approach. Its research methods have been a more pointed investigation, reflecting on HICA's curating of exhibitions, hosting of discussions and production of publications, while they have also encompassed the more prosaic activities in running the space, as basic and practical instances for consideration.

'Curation'

Curation, central to this work, has been employed as an artistic discipline: alongside the activities otherwise required, it has provided the means to creating an artwork. It may be defined here then as 'artist-led' and as a creative activity in-itself: in dialogue with its 'materials' it has manoeuvred and negotiated the gallery's concerns through developing programmes in an equivalent way to, say, the 'intuitive' development of a painting or sculpture. While often necessarily focussed on basic organisation, it has also judged curatorial practice as, in its case, the most useful and appropriate means to discovery; through background research, the various dialogues around artworks and exhibitions, including the manner of its (the HICA programmes') engagement, and the direct aesthetic research developed through the exhibitions themselves.

'Practice'

As I will later discuss, this curatorial method originated from our 'felt' responses, and our reflection on whether these could be understood as intuitive, given the questioning of the intuitive mentioned above: rather than accept a state of unknowingness, it intended to develop means to engage perhaps less familiar forms of reasoning. This study thus purposefully reflects on our means of understanding; questioning the natures of rational or theoretical knowledge, and knowledge developed through the apparently more 'intuitive'. In this consideration, I have proposed the term 'instinctive' over 'intuitive', to recognise the sub- or pre-conscious development of knowledge through our constant immersion in our environment, and thus our habitual understandings.

As with the proposal of a scale of reasoning to replace any sense of a difference of order between the rational and intuitive, I also propose then a working between theory and practice as generally perceived ends of an equivalent scale, not as

11 See section 2.84

separate orders,¹² which could be suggested as activity that is all, in effect, 'theorised practice': a continual working between, that may at times be more identifiable as one or other mode. 'Practice', I suggest therefore as not intuitive or free from ideology. It may equally question what it is informed by; how it determines a sense of a 'right' or 'best' way to proceed.

This conclusion is notably consistent with a Concrete Art's concern with a unity of form and content, where understanding artworks through what they embody provides the means to an exploration of thought through practice.

Thus, how things happen 'in practice'¹³ becomes the focus for exploration: how this 'theorised practice', as with 'form and content', may take shape within the actuality of the Concrete moment itself.

'Practice-led'

As with this focussing on the point of concretization, the study asserts that all is, in some basic way, practice-led. Our more specific understanding of the 'practice-led' may then be that which recognises this state and nature, and that, as a means of engaging and questioning, recognises itself as some form of theorised practice, in employing appropriate (immanent, concrete) methodologies.

HICA's exhibitions, reflecting a developing discussion through a programme of annual series' of shows, have naturally provided the structure on which to base my arguments and thinking in this study, and thus also the structure for this written thesis.

'All artists are alike. They dream of doing something that's more social, more collaborative, and more real than art.' (Dan Graham).¹⁴ I have aimed to consider here various issues that develop from an observation of this tendency, especially as it is manifested in the work of Theo van Doesburg and his defining of ideas of a Concrete Art. A sense of developing direction through HICA's own programme provides an especially appropriate context for a consideration of a drive towards

¹² i.e. not as, 'Action or execution as opposed to theory' J. Pearsall & B. Trumble, (Eds.), 'Practice', *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, p.1136

¹³ Ibid., as 'actually applied in reality'

¹⁴ Quoted by Claire Bishop in *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents*, pp.179-185 [Online]

the 'real' as perhaps a necessary state: it implies the alternative - a lack of inquiry - as a throwing up of our hands, and an acceptance of an absence of progress as some fundamental cultural problem. HICA thus wished to consider this drive as a basic temporal relation; a necessary sense of moving forward, though if still quite possibly, or probably, making very small headway into an immeasurable thing, or, in the way of an orbit, moving continually forward while also maintaining a constant distance (presuming here some Heraclitean sense of constant change, over any kind of real stasis¹⁵). Thus the direction indicated by this study remains *towards* a Concrete Art.

¹⁵ D. W. Graham, *Heraclitus*, [Online]: 'He is best known for his doctrines that things are constantly changing (universal flux)...'

0.1 Introduction/Contextual review

0.11 Origins of the project

I have previously described the farm cottage at Dalcrombie as ‘a perfect place’ for my and Eilidh Crumlish’s setting-up of HICA.¹⁶ I also noted in my introduction to *Four Exhibitions*, our first HICA publication, that the space seemed ‘particularly apt’ for HICA’s ‘investigation’.¹⁷ It seems appropriate, as an introduction to this written documentation, to explain the background to these statements; why we might have thought this, as otherwise, the isolated, rural and ‘remote’ location of HICA might seem far from ideal for a contemporary art gallery.¹⁸



View of HICA

Here then, I will present a brief sketch of how we found ourselves at Dalcrombie. Though I have no particular wish to include biographical detail, it seems right to include information that gives relevant context to the project and the ideas it set out to explore.

¹⁶ As part of my Transfer meeting for this study, held at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, in November 2011

¹⁷ HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.7

¹⁸ HICA occupies part of isolated farm buildings approximately 12 miles south of Inverness, in the hills near Loch Ness, and on a working sheep farm.

The concerns that form the basis of this study have always been present and central in our (my and Eilidh Crumlish’s) work, though they have taken many years to bring into clearer focus. While this focus continues to be developed, we still have a strong sense of the nature of these concerns, individually and between us, that informs our various judgments and opinions.

On my sculpture BA course, in the early 1990s,¹⁹ I was extremely close to better defining my concerns as ‘concrete’, but did not make this direct identification. My interests centred on a sense of visual simile created by the spatial character of forms, and the values and interpretations that these then developed. This ‘real’ focus for poetic connections especially manifested in a concern with the everyday; as I put it in one statement of the time, I had no desire to make sculpture that walked on the water, but sculpture that got its feet wet.²⁰

One question I had asked during a seminar in the second year of my study,²¹ became a point of focus for me for some years after: I showed two slides, one of a Gabo construction and one of an Eric Gill figurative carving, as a fairly random example but providing a sufficient comparison to the Gabo to ask, which should be considered the most ‘abstract’? My own interests, and ideas such as ‘truth to materials’ that we were being asked to consider by the course, seemed to suggest the Gabo, though immediately apparent as non-representational, as also clearly less ‘abstract’; the materials it employed were to be understood directly, as opposed to the more illusionistic Gill.

As I recall there was no particular response from the student group or tutor present to this question, and I reflect on the difficulties and complexities of making sense of new concepts and differing discourses in that, even given my own presenting and consideration of this example, I did not hit directly upon the term ‘concrete’ at the time. Indeed, as specific realisation, this only came a few years later.²²

¹⁹ At the Kent Institute for Art and Design, at Canterbury, 1992-1995.

²⁰ Student statement, Canterbury, June 1994

²¹ An open discussion held for all three sculpture year-groups

²² While artists I looked at on my BA tended to have connections directly to this area of thinking, such as with Gabo, Max Bill and Alexander Calder, or with its more varied and more recent development, such as with Ian Hamilton Finlay, Joseph Beuys, Tony Cragg or Claes Oldenburg, my first conscious noting of the term and its history came after reading the entry under ‘Concrete Art’ in E. Lucie-Smith, *Dictionary of Art Terms*, p.56, probably sometime in 1997.

L: Naum Gabo, *Linear Construction in Space No.2*, 1957-58
 R: Eric Gill, *Ecstasy*, 1910-11

The HICA project, and then this study, have been more focussed and developed means for continuing this same questioning and inquiry.

0.12 Ideas forming from a reflection on the arrangement of allotment plots

It was a few years after finishing my BA that I met Eilidh Crumlish, through working together at The Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain). Crumlish had recently completed her Fine Art MA, and we continued to develop our practice, taking part in some small exhibitions, peripherally within the London art-world. At this time there seemed very little discussion amongst our friends and contacts of the particular kind we were looking for, or, we were not able to identify clearly enough our own interests which then might lead us to the discussions we might hope to engage in.

We had jointly kept an allotment from early in 2000, near to where we were living, in South London. This was a beautiful spot on the edge of Dulwich woods; a hill-side descending from the woods in what is a very genteel and surprisingly countrified corner of London, close to Dulwich College. The plots at the top of the hill have a very impressive view over the whole centre of London, to Westminster,

the Post Office Tower, and on a clear day, Wembley Stadium and beyond. Dulwich being a very affluent suburb, there were people with a lot of money occupying some of the allotments, and as they were in such a fine location these allotments were quite in-demand. Given this, we were surprised to very quickly be offered a plot. Our allotment, we found, was toward the bottom of the hill. This was fine by us. We were delighted to get a plot. We noticed though, as we began working on it, that those on our neighbouring plots, perhaps just coincidentally, had strong South London accents, or were Irish, Black, Italian... It was explained to us by neighbouring plot-holders that there was a clear hierarchy: plot-holders occupying the higher echelons were characterised as those who might have the best stainless-steel tools, tools which remained in pristine condition as their owners mainly used their plots for having barbeques or growing just a few more exotic crops. Those at the bottom tended to work their plots in more basic ways, mostly growing staple crops such as potatoes, carrots, onions etcetera. One of our neighbours, who was especially vocal about this state of affairs used the term “Herberts” (or more accurately ‘Erberts), for those toward the top.

Why I mention this detail here is that some significant point of connection seemed to be made through this period on the allotment, providing more focussed beginnings of our concerns, and ultimately influencing the form of HICA and our subsequent work, including this study. This point lay somewhere in the clarity with which we found the arrangement of allotments on this hillside presented a sense of positioning, tied-in with an overt sense of concretization through the direct reaping of what is sown. Decisions made and actions taken, at all scales, clearly revealed standpoints and values, consistent between a person’s position and the look of their plot, and, furthermore, in a fairly immediate relation of getting-out what you put-in.

There certainly were apparent exceptions; the eccentrics who occupied plots in places that seemed contrary, through some historic choice or decision, or those not especially conforming to any available position, having been placed through others’ judgements, and, like ourselves, thus forming a certain random input into the ongoing community of plots. Though then there also seemed the action of conforming to your plot’s position, of feeling its influence in how you began to ‘fit-in’. Thus, over time, the eccentrics appeared to be accommodated as well as any, as a necessary ingredient, and the ‘randoms’ were perhaps not

as random as it first seemed: where we might have felt ourselves to be largely standing outside and observing this hierarchy, to be fairly immune to it, our resulting position was probably (and almost certainly from others' points of view), appropriate to ourselves and our approach. Given these exceptions then, that might not be as exceptional as they first seem, and while there did not seem an absolute law identifying habits, there still were clearly general organisational principles, determined through behaviours, that operated in establishing positions - an organisation dependent on the range of various attitudes and characters in dialogue somehow with the exact nature of their plots.

While it was clear these positionings were linked to 'class', more pertinently here, a sense of class seemed only one main constituent within the relation between the distribution of plots and the philosophies they revealed, determining what a plot might look like; the kinds of veg, the numbers of paths, the places to sit, tools used, and so on.

You can't sow corn and want to reap peas,
Anyhow you come by dem peas dem you steal,
Its nat'ral actions that reveal...
And that's how I have get to know de real²³

Perhaps the allotments just offered a very particular focus for our thoughts about artworks at the time: peoples' interactions with their plots as the operations of 'thing-words in space-time' (Augusto de Campos' definition of concrete poetry, which I shall later reflect on), and a sense of 'positioning' as the result of particular character; where in a waiting room you might sit, where on a bus, where in any grouping or gathering... an overall 'where do you stand?' being posed by artworks concerned with activating the relationship between spectator and artwork; the whole participatory and Relational turn.

Some brief observations then, to present something of our sense of the relation between the 'look' of plot and plot-holder, from some examples around us: there was a slightly dubious old character nicknamed Marathon, due to his, ridiculed by others', claim to have run a marathon sometime in the recent past. His plot showed remarkably depleted soil. He was always looking for a quick fix, using

large amounts of chemicals, though his crops remained sickly specimens... A middle-aged Italian couple who had a very business-like approach and frequently argued. They had an enviably, aggressively, productive plot – lots of excellent tomatoes... A large, older man nicknamed 'Strimmer' (as he strimmed around all the plots) who reminded me of some Papillion-style convict, turning up at regular times, early evening, to stare at his plot, slightly lost-looking, hands in pockets. His plot was in good order, simple but productive, so he clearly did work at it, but I don't remember ever seeing him working. Then we didn't see him for a while and we heard he had died of a heart attack... There were two, quite short, middle-aged men; brothers, who were very industrious; furtive comings and goings, wheelbarrows of stuff, always to-and-fro. They had an ex-racing greyhound, and were always busy with their raised beds... There was someone we knew to be an architect, and would often be dressed in a suit (an example of one of the more eccentric seeming positionings), whose extensive plots (two, plus some) were a tour de force of design and maintenance; vegetable patches nestled within elaborate arrangements of flowerbeds and arbours, expertly kept... and our neighbour, who I mentioned earlier (and who took over from Strimmer), who had been in the army and served in Northern Ireland, did occasional lorry driving and generally seemed to scratch a living doing this and that. He dealt efficiently enough with his own plot, growing good and basic crops, but almost seemed stuck with it, doing it while he tried to figure out what else to do, and growing some things like rhubarb, which he admitted he didn't like... Describing them now, they seem to appear as soap-opera caricatures, but in that way perhaps indicate just how particular the relation seemed between personality and plot, a state here reflecting also on the relation between artist and artwork.

How did we approach our own plot? How have we then approached HICA? Any observers I'm sure could make immediate connections, but it seems part of the nature of the process to always be harder to see your own positionings. Our inquiries have continued to muse on such questions: Is it possible to stand outside this kind of relation and see it objectively? Do groups of people, the whole community of plot-holders perhaps, similarly operate through some inevitable separation in their relation to their field of action? How are individual actions then integrated into larger movements?



Photo of our allotment in London (L), and of our current veg patch (R)

0.13 A possible relation of the Intuitive and Rational

Continuing a train of thought in consideration of the allotments, the schema suggested by the site proposed those at the bottom of the hill as ‘naturally’ closer to the ‘real’, and those at the top, as more removed: those at the bottom *were* more heads-down and involved with their plots. Those at the top *were* deemed more lofty; both symbolically and literally wishing for their view elsewhere.

This schema suggests an immediately acceptable (readily understood, on becoming part of the relation) map of values applicable to this scenario, where the ‘lowers’ are, by extension, implied as more Intuitive, and the ‘uppers’, more Rational. As an extreme characterisation, the more ‘real’ involvement of the lowers manifests in more innocent, more child-like or ‘primitive’ behaviour, while the uppers are more knowing, more considered and sophisticated: where the uppers engage more with their eyes, the lowers get their hands dirty. To illustrate such a characterisation employed in relation to artistic endeavours, Van Gogh, in a letter written in Arles in 1888, describes Gauguin, saying ‘...we have the greatest need of people with the hands and stomachs of a labourer – and more natural tastes – more amorous and benevolent temperaments – than the decadent and exhausted Parisian boulevardier... we are in the presence of a virgin creature with

the instincts of a wild animal.’²⁴

In the light of this characterisation and distinction, the etymology of abstract and concrete seem especially revealing, as, from the Latin *abstrahere* and *concrecere*; to ‘draw apart’ and to ‘grow together’.²⁵ As will later be discussed in relation to perspective painting, it seems the act of drawing apart from the ‘real’, and the developing of a ‘window on to the world’²⁶ go hand-in-hand. In this case, and in-line with Van Gogh’s expressed desires, the general direction of Modern art is downhill; upsetting pictorial perspective in order to highlight the object status of artworks and their involvements in real space: not a move toward the abstract, but toward the concrete.

Where and how might science fit in this relation? Its necessary engagements with the ‘real’ would seem closely connected to this modernist descent. John Gray has commented:

An old fairy tale has it that science began with the rejection of superstition. In fact it was the rejection of rationalism that gave birth to scientific inquiry. Ancient and medieval thinkers believed the world could be understood by applying first principles. Modern science begins when observation and experiment come first, and the results are accepted even when what they show seems to be impossible. In what might seem a paradox, scientific empiricism – reliance on actual experience rather than supposedly rational principles – has very often gone with an interest in magic.²⁷

24 K. Willsher (2012) ‘*Electrifying*’ Van Gogh and Gauguin letter tells of artistic hopes that soon turned sour, The Guardian, 24 November 2012, p.3. It is also relevant to note here that Hegel, in discussing the development of stages of self-consciousness, and the forming through these of subject/object relations, couches these relations, as they apply to human subjects, in terms of Lord and bondsman; analogies that seem immediately applicable to the relations presented by these allotments. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp.115-119

25 The Oxford English Reference Dictionary gives the meanings as: *ab-* ‘off, away, from...’ + *trahere* ‘draw’, and *com-* ‘with, together...’ + *crescere* ‘grow’. J. Pearsall & B. Trumble (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, pp.1;6;286;300

26 Bill Hare discusses Alberti’s theorising of the illusionistic role of art during the Italian Renaissance, in National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.84

27 J. Gray, *The Immortalization Commission*, pp.5-6

These comments are most applicable then to a rejection of the rationalism that may have gone along with a schema such as that of Plato's *Divided Line*.²⁸ If the schema of the plots may still be judged to suggest travel between more intuitive and rational behaviours, Gray's comments might still exempt the rational procedures of science, which, in its intended objectivity and systematic reasoning would seem to still place it firmly at the top.

Diagrammatic presentation of Plato's The Divided Line

HICA, and this study, have considered that the more or less consciously reasoned both have necessary functions, while both, to perhaps differing degrees, remain necessarily separate from the 'real' as aspects of our inescapable subjectivity. Here then, in relation to a schema such as Plato's *Divided Line*, there seems a conclusion instead of something more complex and less hierarchical: we may all, 'uppers' and 'lowers', in different ways at different times, find ways to step-outside of these particular relations, while we may all also be inevitably within a lived engagement, negotiating the 'real'. This conclusion might then allow the potential for science to be seen as simultaneously undermining our sense of possible escape from the real, reinforcing that we are part of the physical world, always one with

28 Plato, *The Republic*, pp.274-275

the concrete, while doing this through some capacity for objective reasoning. Any sense of substantial difference between the Intuitive and Rational might instead be implied as illusory, an illusion that exposes a longing for entire separation, of escape from things that might not be so desirable... (as Gray goes on to consider in his book, *The Immortalization Commission*; the desire to escape death through whatever means available: scientific or otherwise.) As a small example, we were aware of higher-plot-holders who paid lower-plot-holders to dig their plots over for them. While in terms of busy people balancing their time and money this may seem fair enough, in the context of keeping on an allotment this avoidance of less desirable aspects appeared absurdly counter to the whole intention. Here, the plots and their activity had a quality of a Memento Mori: reminding both upper and lower that all are part of the same processes, from which there is no escape: no buying your way out, or means of transcendence.

0.14 A possible paradoxical relation between Art and Objecthood

Pursuing the sense of something more complex than the scale of Intuitive to Rational then; does the move toward the 'real' in Modern approaches in art still ultimately necessitate a separation out from the actual; is there forever a gulf between 'art' and 'objecthood'?²⁹ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy commented, on leaving the Bauhaus:

The school today swims no longer against the current. It tries to fall in line. This is what weakens the power of the unit. Community spirit is replaced by individual competition, and the question arises whether the existence of a creative group is only possible on the basis of opposition to the status quo.³⁰

There is some commonality here also with Greenberg's discussion in *Avant-garde and Kitsch* where kitsch is aligned with the academic.³¹ Greenberg thus suggests kitsch as a universal culture, spread via industrialization: 'the first

29 Here I present the terms as considered by Michael Fried in his text *Art and Objecthood*, included in C. Harrison, & P. Wood, (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, pp.822-832

30 S. Bann (ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, pp.136-137

31 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.12

universal culture ever beheld',³² and that art dissolves when it is incorporated into the mainstream. As these comments reflect, this state seems to bear comparison to certain physical systems; the formation of eddies in flowing liquids, for instance, as with this description by Peter Stevens:

The eddy appears to be a prototypical model of spatial enclosure. In wrapping around on itself it creates a sheltered and protective environment, a special withinness that is different from the withoutness of the moving stream. It often gets swirled uphill against the current – by the action of the rest of the stream rushing down. It exists by bleeding energy from the mainstream, much like a living thing, for living things also make their environment pay the price for their existence. Through digestion, living things break down the organization of other living things. They leave a trail of broken pieces and disorder in their wake. The universe deteriorates faster because of their existence. But, temporarily, as a local organized event, they, like eddies, live and evolve by flowing against the tide.³³

Where living itself is an act of swimming against the current, making this further analogy suggests art as some exaggerated form of this same process. But perhaps again there are more complex ways of seeing this relation, that more recent developments in art practice have found ways to explore.

Virginia Button and Charles Esche describe the shift that they identify the YBAs as enabling, in relation (through the media) to a mass audience, allowing 'artists of all generations to feel confident in their social role and courageous enough to try to speak to as broad an audience as possible',³⁴ the suggestion being that the YBAs had successfully found means elusive to earlier endeavours, such as those of the Constructivists. In retrospect, Constructivist dilemmas around art and technology exemplify this problem: they reveal their attempts at engaging a mass audience as always remaining top-down direction; their logic suggesting they become straightforwardly technicians or engineers, while their artistic inclinations

32 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.14

33 P. S. Stevens, *Patterns in Nature*, p.81

34 V. Button & C. Esche in Tate, *Intelligence: New British Art 2000*, p.10

and frequent lack of aptitude expose their necessary, and aesthetic, distance.³⁵ While they might thus recognise the 'bourgeois preoccupation with the representation and interpretation of reality',³⁶ they frequently appear too caught up in their own bourgeois ways of being to satisfyingly negotiate this dilemma. As with the example of Van Gogh's describing Gauguin, their recognising the appeal of, or need for, the 'common' brings with it attendant difficulties; of affected manner, if seeking to appear one with the masses, or of art still being the patronising or worthy gesture, if not. The perception of those 'lower' as less self-conscious, more intimate with the real and thus natural in their behaviour, implies a distance, which contrarily reveals a melancholic position, trapped on an upper – all too self-conscious - plot.

If any change to this state has indeed taken place, then perhaps the YBAs were able to start from a position that was in some way simply more 'common'? That is, as well as the YBAs' own possible brashness, there would appear for them much less of a gulf between artist and audience, a much closer discussion of a shared culture, indicating that the landscape itself may have been subject to some seismic shift; the apparently timeless order of upper and lower, Intuitive and Rational, nudged sufficiently to allow an equivalent shift of art and object?

Any shift here may very well seem due at least to the persistent effort initiated by the Constructivists, part of the potential identified in the New art, pursued through various developments since. GRAV and New Tendencies works may be understood, for instance, to be 'accessible without any art-historical training... as a democratization of art and liberation from the arrogance of bourgeois culture'.³⁷ There appears something in the grounding of the New in the ways the 'universe constructs its own',³⁸ that is necessary at least for envisioning this shift.

35 Lodder variously presents this difficulty, especially in her discussion of ideas of production art, where she concludes: 'Constructivism and production art itself could not be realised without the artist-constructor. The artist-constructor had to bring together in one person, to an almost superhuman degree, the professional equipment of both the gifted artist and the experienced director of technology. This ideal could only be the product of a totally new professional training.' C. Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p.108

36 A. Scharf, *Constructivism*, in N. Stangos (Ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art*, p.162

37 W.Grasskamp, *Hans Haacke*, p.31

38 N. Gabo, & A. Pevsner, *The Realistic Manifesto*, in S. Bann, (Ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.9

Claire Bishop's 2006 Artforum article, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents*,³⁹ attests still to the presence of this dilemma though, encountered again in recent practice, expressly the participatory and Relational, where she argues works' desired involvements with the 'real' are again incompatible with the aesthetic. She cites recent critical debate, and this criticism's bypassing the aesthetic and moving solely toward a consideration of the ethical: 'This ethical imperative finds support in most of the theoretical writing on art that collaborates with "real" people'.⁴⁰ Bishop suggests the strengths instead of those projects, which intentionally or not, counter the values and direction of this critical debate, and '...attempt to think the aesthetic and the social/political together, rather than subsuming both within the ethical'⁴¹ (giving examples of artists such as Thomas Hirschorn, Alexander Mir, Francis Alÿs). Her conclusion she states as in accord with the thinking of Jacques Rancière:

...this denigration of the aesthetic ignores the fact that the system of art as we understand it in the West – the "aesthetic regime of art" inaugurated by Friedrich Schiller and the Romantics and still operative to this day – is predicated precisely on a confusion between art's autonomy (its position at one remove from instrumental rationality) and heteronomy (its blurring of art and life). Untangling this knot – or ignoring it by seeking more concrete ends for art – is slightly to miss the point, since the aesthetic is, according to Rancière, the ability to think contradiction: the productive contradiction of art's relationship to social change...⁴²

Is there forever an impasse here, albeit one that is productive by way of its contradictions, which frustrates efforts to engage the 'real'? Or are there ways to more satisfyingly negotiate this area, that come through recognising that we are now in a period that is, as Greenberg states, 'both child and negation of Romanticism',⁴³ which continues to seek development through a New direction?

39 C. Bishop, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents*, in Artforum, February 2006, pp.179-185 [Online]

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 In *Towards a Newer Laocoon*, in J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.28

0.15 The beginnings of curatorial procedures as practice

These various points, stemming from a consideration of the allotment site, I suggest are the more particular origins of concerns within HICA's inquiries. While, in the garden at HICA, and in partial view from the gallery, we have maintained a veg plot, very close in form to our original allotment, as a continuing personal focus, and subtle inclusion of these same concerns into the form of the HICA space, the HICA gallery itself also has a very large window with views out over the surrounding landscape which we have found, by chance, has worked perfectly to present and encapsulate a very close equivalent to these same issues: expressly around our separation from, or concrete involvement in, the here and now.⁴⁴ Thus, each exhibition in the space has prompted new thoughts, or suggested further lines of inquiry through their differing responses to this window. Most have directly included the window and view in some way. For the others, that have not, it has still formed a very significant part of the context, even through its omission.

Notably also, in relation to this discussion of the allotment plots, HICA's, and thus the window's own physical position is half-way up its particular hillside; highly apt as a background position for the project: a point of consideration, of judging the implications of the schema as a whole, and potential of either further ascent or descent.

At around the time of these thoughts first becoming clearer in regard to the allotment, while we were still in London, we had also begun to organise some small exhibitions. From mid-2003, we shared a studio in a local church, and over the next few years were able to use the space as a venue for very occasional exhibitions of our own works, and works of invited friends.⁴⁵ These projects now largely seem first experiments in the practical side of organising exhibitions, and

44 This window thus in-itself presents core themes of this study, a main reason for using its image, as part of the Boyle Family's installation at HICA, as the study's cover image. It, for example, very readily connects to the discussion of windows in relation to ideas of representation, in Rosalind Krauss' essay *Grids*, (In R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, pp.9-22) and the further themes that that text engages.

45 The main ones of these were held in April and October 2004 and October 2005, at what we called the 'One Tree Studios', at St. Augustine's Church, One Tree Hill, London, SE23

of seeing ourselves in the position of organisers. (Though the title of the last two of these shows, as 'Screen', I and II, relating again to a sense of 'windows', was chosen with many of the themes in mind that have since become central to HICA and this study.)

This church is just a few miles from Goldsmiths College, and this proximity presents a general observation around our development of ideas from this time. We were in contact with people variously teaching or studying at Goldsmiths, and a number of them attended these exhibitions. We have reflected that at the time, there was, for us, some element missing in these dialogues; they made apparent a general disappointment with the only opportunities seemingly available to us, to engage within the London art-world, through taking part in numbers of group exhibitions around some fairly randomly imposed theme with the hope of being 'spotted'. While these dialogues, as example, have developed along with HICA, with several significant contributors to our programme being connected to Goldsmiths, it is notable that this development has been enabled through our clearer articulation of ideas, an articulation that has been reliant on our relocating our discussion away from London. At the time of these few exhibitions we were very much desiring to find our way forward in this, and the first hints of how this might be achieved were, somewhat surprisingly, coming from our engagement with this church space. Something there, in connection with our observations around the allotment site and developing 'concrete' identification and focus, felt more substantial. Despite our being quite unsure as to how it might all fit with ideas of current practice, we began to be more attentive to what were, for us, more useful indicators of direction.

On reflection there seems some equivalent realisation on our part to the example of Geraldo de Barros, later discussed,⁴⁶ who in the early 1950s in São Paulo, stepped back from his painting and photography, to pursue, after his chance observation of a mechanics' workshop, the production of household furniture as his primary activity.⁴⁷ Our hosting shows, especially in this non-art space, enabled engagement in ways other than making objects for a particular gallery system, and our experience of this was very positive: it enabled a developing sense of a dispersed form of Institutional Critique; a wider cultural engagement.

46 See section 3.36

47 *Geraldo de Barros: Sobras em Obras*, (1999), 27.30mins

Concurrent with these developments our situation in London, with our studio, teaching, home and even allotment, were becoming, for a variety of reasons, increasingly precarious, which perhaps explains why, when Eilidh Crumlish got some work in the Inverness area we saw this as an opportunity to move away from London, with an eye on her intention, which had always been to move back to Scotland.⁴⁸ We both wished to live for a while outside the city; it suited our temperaments, attitudes towards work and life, and may be seen here as an example of a decision made through what seemed, to us, 'good' positioning.

0.16 Our move to the Highlands and the establishing of HICA

Whether this move was our also being part of the zeitgeist is impossible for us to say. Charlie Gere, for instance, has commented on an 'exodus', 'away from capitalism and towards a general strategy of autonomy...' which exploits 'the expanded potential offered by new technological and social assemblages.'⁴⁹ This question around our moving to the Highlands remains a background consideration of this text. I'm sure it was our being part of a more general tendency in some ways, though it felt an entirely individual move, through our own reasons, to us. At the time of moving we had no intention of opening a gallery, though we also were variously aware of a range of projects extending the territory of contemporary art discussions in related ways, such as the globally dispersed artists and artists' groups maintaining interest in contemporary Constructivist and 'reductive' modes, around such 'hubs' as MinusSpace in New York,⁵⁰ or the tendency exemplified by those individuals and projects contributing to events such as the *Wilderness Art Conference*; *Wind As Context*, in Hailuoto (an island in northern Finland), in 2012.⁵¹ I would say that we have generally operated with a consistent, if very vague sense in mind, of wishing to make a positive contribution – a contribution that might result in greater sustainability for current practice, achieving a more

48 Crumlish's family is Scottish and she grew up in Edinburgh. Her work has also been variously concerned with the Highlands, and Loch Torridon especially, through a family connection to the area.

49 In Tate, *Intelligence: New British Art* 2000, p.23

50 www.minusspace.com, which has moved more recently to focus more on its gallery activities, though still represents a 'platform for reductive art on the international level'

51 The conference took place from May 24th - 26th 2012 in Hailuoto, Finland, and was organised by Hai Art: <http://haiart.net/>

reasonable existence for contemporary art and artists, and doing this through a widening of scope, both in terms of modes of practice and geography. Here we could certainly identify with Gere's comments, and consider that we might be part of a general trend.

Being very open to where we would actually end up, we moved to the Highlands in late 2006. Very soon after, in conversation with the prior tenant at Dalcrombie, they let us know of their imminent moving-out, and thus we moved in, in early 2007.

Dalcrombie, as a tenancy on a small estate, seemed fairly perfect to us, as a place to start working, and, as time went on, to fit our developing idea of perhaps having some exhibitions in the space.

Although it is a quite isolated farm cottage, half-an-hour's drive from Inverness, it engages all these thoughts and dialogues from this development period in almost uncannily precise ways. It also has a large room, part of a 'steading-conversion' attached to the cottage: a fine space, big enough for a small gallery. The idea for the space evolved from my first thought of just a large plywood box, constructed within this room, to Eilidh's suggestion of a partitioned space at the back of the room, which became HICA's first incarnation, and which then, through each show, spilled out to include the whole converted part of the building.

Here then what I feel are the main reasons for HICA being as it is and where it is, a mix of accident and design: we found ourselves wanting to keep up dialogue with friends and contacts, and extend our own concerns; practical involvement through hosting shows would maintain this. HICA was at first envisaged as a very private project: sufficient to invite people to send some work, place this in the space and have some dialogue around it, without need for public awareness of this activity.⁵²

⁵² As similar instances of this kind of project, we were struck by Jan van der Ploeg's description of Julian Dashper's initiating of a dialogue around contemporary art in his home town of Auckland, New Zealand. Checking the details of this again with van der Ploeg, he has said, '...the *weekend/home* exhibition in Julian's apartment in Auckland was organized by Australian artist Vincente Butron as a part of his *Residence* exhibition series. The idea was to hang a work in someone's living room for about 2 hours, invite people to come and have a look, meet with the artist(s) and to discuss the work...' but the significant difference here to usual

Discussions held with people working in the arts locally,⁵³ in the run-up to opening HICA, largely prompted us to develop the project into being more than just this private dialogue; to see it as something for possible public engagement and as a potential resource for local schools and colleges. This suggestion was made to us primarily because of a marked absence of other public contemporary-art spaces in the area.

0.17 The relation of HICA to other art activities in the Highlands

The area is perhaps fairly usual in having numbers of small commercial galleries (many mainly appealing to tourist trade), in and around Inverness itself, as well as spread throughout the Highlands, with, in addition, other occasional activities: public art projects, artist's projects temporarily located in the area, or other locally-based activity, fairly open in admitting its mostly parochial nature.

Extra to this we have (and had) been aware of activities more particular in their relation to the Highlands and expressly Gaelic culture. Though an important part of the context and, as will be noted, context here is accepted as very significant in-itself, as perhaps 'half the work',⁵⁴ I suggest that this project's focus on HICA and the concrete states some remove from these concerns. That is, these concerns are, despite this importance, engaged somewhat obliquely by HICA's own project, and, as such, will not be detailed here in this study, especially recognising that they form part of other current or recent studies; most pertinently the basis of Murdo

gatherings was that '...there were no drinks served apart from a glass of water. And so it was in a way more about the work [than] about a social gathering. Some of the invited people didn't understand or like that aspect and left early.' As van der Ploeg had first described to us, something in the way this was done encapsulated our own motivations for running a space. Van der Ploeg continues '... I thought it was ...a good and interesting focus on the work and practice of the artist and it inspired me to first start organizing *Residence* exhibitions in Amsterdam and later on to start PS project space in our living room.' J. van der Ploeg, (2014) Personal e-mail to the author.

⁵³ particularly with Robert Livingstone, the then Director of HI-Arts, the arts development agency for the Highlands and Islands, that was dissolved in 2013 (this meeting was held on 3rd June 2008), and with Cathy Shankland, Highland Council's Exhibitions Officer, based at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, who at the time was also the Area Cultural Officer for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey (meeting held on 30th July 2008).

⁵⁴ David Harding notes the maxim of the APG (Artists' Placement Group), 'the context is half the work', in HICA, *Exhibitions 2010*, p.34

Macdonald's *Window to the West* project, 'an interdisciplinary visual arts research project... re-examining and re-asserting the central position of the visual within the culture of the Greater Gaidhealtachd'.⁵⁵ This remove from these concerns noted, I wish to very briefly still comment on where this project's and HICA's focus may overlap in a more significant way than simply through a shared interest in contemporary art. Macdonald's project, documented and discussed in *Rethinking Highland Art: The Visual Significance of Gaelic Culture*, reflects on historical examples such as the Book of Kells⁵⁶ as well as instances of engagement with contemporary art, such as Joseph Beuys' work on Rannoch Moor.⁵⁷ Macdonald's comment that, 'it is perhaps surprising to note that contemporary art, rather than being something that one might tack on in a tokenistic way after historical deliberations, is a key source for the appreciation of the wider visual art traditions of the Gaidhealtachd',⁵⁸ most clearly indicates a particular sympathy here; that HICA's concern is with an essential aesthetic basis to experience, grounded in, and seeking to engage meaning in what may be understood to be 'concrete', that informs all cultures equally, and may be especially productive in cultures more accepting of, or receptive to that aesthetic and concrete relation. Here George Rickey's comments, for instance, that;

prototypes of the Constructivist image had appeared in many forms: in painted pottery over thousands of years, in geometrical mosaics on the floors of Roman baths and early Christian churches, in Islamic lattices, tile and plaster work, in Celtic interlaces, in heraldic checks and quarterings, in flags, in iron grills, stained glass patterns, woven tartans and rugs, and in the stylized knot drawings of Dürer and Leonardo⁵⁹

on the one hand may be judged just a noting of interest in pattern, or indicate a focus of interest in the material, a response to the nature of space and the forms that it creates, with implications, as I shall variously consider, for relations to the world and ideas of 'Nature'. The 'New' art of Constructivism may here itself be a reasserting, or reconnecting, to some very old concerns in art: a fascination

55 M. Macdonald et al (Eds.), *Rethinking Highland Art: The Visual Significance of Gaelic Culture*, p.6

56 Ibid., p.92

57 Ibid., p.106

58 Ibid.

59 G. Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution*, p.9

with the 'eternity and immutability of the elements of rational universality'⁶⁰ or as Stephen Bann reflects, Constructivism, in part, 'signified a revival of the belief in a fixed, classical vocabulary'.⁶¹ He quotes Lissitzky and Ehrenberg, writing in 1922, for instance: 'In the flux of forms binding laws do exist, and the classical models need cause no alarm to the artists of the New Age'.⁶²

While this thesis intends to explore and develop alternative conceptions of this 'eternity and immutability', this 'reassertion', in-itself, may be judged the prompt for and the manifestation of the suggested cultural shift between the time of the Constructivists and now, a continuing effort that sees all to be, universally, in dialogue through and with this 'classical vocabulary', enabling a more democratic vision, and a sense of unity of art and life.

Important connections between concerns here are considered in Lucy Lippard's *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, exploring Minimalists' and Conceptualists' development of common 'preoccupations' with those of 'ancient peoples',⁶³ and, in her chapter *The Forms of Time: Earth and Sky, Words and Numbers*, specifically exploring the 'mathematical sophistication' of "primitive peoples",⁶⁴ and the applications of mathematics and geometry in recent art:

The Minimalists' and Conceptualists' obsession with simple word and number systems, with basic geometry, with repetition, modules, measurement and mapping, laid the ground for "primitivizing" artists of the '70s to explore more complex areas of myth and history. This may sound odd to those familiar with the Minimalists' concerted effort to exclude all symbolic, metaphorical or referential aspects from their art; they hoped to create a concrete actuality, perceived within the "real time" of the immediate present. Yet while few stylistic connections can be made to the "mythicists", these disparate groups share an idealistic notion that art can become more democratic, more accessible to a wider audience, by becoming simpler.⁶⁵

60 Francis Haserot's phrase in suggesting a common focus between Spinoza's and Plato's philosophies, in S. P. Kashap (Ed), *Studies in Spinoza*, p.67

61 S. Bann, *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.xxx

62 Ibid.

63 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, p.77

64 Ibid., p.82

65 Ibid., p.77

Her considerations then judge the ‘...gradual upsurge of mythical and ritual content related to nature and to the origins of social life’⁶⁶ in the work of recent artists, and in their ‘attempt to recall the function of art by looking back to times and places where art was inseparable from life’.⁶⁷

Lippard is careful to avoid a romantic harking-back,⁶⁸ and to keep the art vital in its own terms:

...a passion for the past need not exclude commitment to change in the present. For me, the most effective contemporary artists working with primal images and ideas are those who are keenly aware of the abyss that separates the maker of a “primitivist” object today and the maker of the ancient (or contemporary, but foreign) objects that inspired it.⁶⁹

Even so, there seems some inevitable surrounding prelapsarian sense still in this rediscovering of ‘mythical and ritual content’, and in-tune with the particular idealisms, such as the ‘dropping-out’ of culture of the 1960s and ‘70s, indicated here by such things as Lippard’s use of the word ‘primal’.

Here again, as with the conclusion from my allotment plot analogy, I would wish to suggest that there are more complex relations at work than those that are most immediately apparent. Lippard equally considers this point, to distinguish between the art activities that are her focus, and other, perhaps closely related but problematic positions, that work on such simplistic characterisations as I earlier discussed in reflecting on ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ plot-holders: attitudes that might incorporate ‘...the insidious notion of the artist as political innocent whose domain is mystery, not reality, and who is thus equated with the “childlike”, “primitive” innocent in a kind of extended racism.’⁷⁰ Thus Lippard’s considerations present a development from concerns with simple geometries and the constructivists’ ‘classical vocabulary’ to, formally, extremely varied works, even including those with ‘mythical and ritual content’, which connects between contemporary Western and other cultures in an intended wholly democratic way, and, I propose, broadly

66 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, p.5

67 Ibid., p.4

68 Ibid., p.12

69 Ibid., p.9

70 Ibid.

represents here the area of shared interest between HICA and those reasserting Gaelic visual culture. In this, there is a guarding against simplistic and romantic characterisations to maintain more complex and contemporarily relevant positions.

I shall variously consider through this text where HICA diverges from, or, I believe, expands on such views. Here though, through these several notes, I wish to indicate how our establishing of HICA, with its Constructivist concerns, might be judged to have notable things in common with Malcolm Maclean’s establishing of An Lanntair, an ‘aspirational contemporary gallery’ in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, using the experience he ‘gained as one of the group that had established Peacock Printmakers in Aberdeen’.⁷¹ Here also though, the clear and significant differences: Maclean’s founding of An Lanntair appears a direct part of this ‘re-asserting’ of particularly Gaelic visual culture. As mentioned, our focus for our activity may be strongly sympathetic, but remains separate.

This difference also seemed quite apparent within these discussions held prior to our opening of HICA, where we understood there to be a suggestion that the Gaidhealtachd has a literary and musical but not a visual culture. We felt encouraged to thus see the potential for HICA to represent a conversation, locally, more in line with artist-run spaces in urban centres (Embassy or Collective Gallery in Edinburgh, Generator in Dundee, or Transmission in Glasgow might be examples). By this, the suggestion seemed, HICA might to some extent fill the notable gap left by Art.tm, a public contemporary art space in the centre of Inverness, which closed in 2002,⁷² and which appears the only concerted effort to establish a significant contemporary art presence within the Inverness area. (Again, it is also notable that the Islands have much better provision through spaces such as An Lanntair, The Pier Arts Centre in Stromness, and Taigh Chearsabhagh in Lochmaddy). Though our intentions for HICA were significantly different again, in this comparison, by considering something of this proposed role for HICA we were still, in a reasonably informed way, stepping in to what was an area of local controversy: the story of Art.tm is sharply contested, with numerous different versions of its history being recounted to us over the years. Those we understand to have been in some way opposed to the idea of Art.tm have mainly

71 A. Watson in M. Macdonald et al (Eds.), *Rethinking Highland Art: The Visual Significance of Gaelic Culture*, p.14

72 *Print studio offers open access to all* (2006), Inverness Courier, published 7 July 2006 [Online]

put forward the view that it encountered difficulties due to the nature of its local engagement, which resulted in growing unpopularity.⁷³ Adam Sutherland, who was Director of Art.tm through its first and most vibrant phase, and who has since developed Grizedale Arts, has commented;

In my time, 95-99, the programme largely disenfranchised the very small membership in favour of a wider engagement with the Highland area – this was ambitious and required continual renewal and external funding – it was however very successful and described a role for the organisation and a role for art/creative practice in the wider community. Unfortunately it was not sustained after my departure, perhaps the vision was not clear enough, but the most likely scenario is that the disenfranchised individuals and the SAC [Scottish Arts Council] set up confrontational positions trying to drive the organisation in an entirely different direction than the one it was designed for. This ultimately resulted in the dismantling of the programme and ultimately the building itself - recreating the printmakers club of old – unused, unvisited and over staffed.⁷⁴

Sutherland also reflects on the origins of Art.tm, which may here be compared to Maclean's establishing of An Lanntair:

Art.tm started as Highland Printmakers Workshop and Gallery and was set up by SAC following the blueprint established by Peacock and the other print workshops – an attempt to give some kind of facilities to artists and to draw them together as a community. For an area as thinly populated as the Highlands and without an art school this was always a bit too esoteric for any meaningful role. Art.tm was developed by the board of HPWG alongside the director and ratified by a number of studies initiated by SAC.⁷⁵

In contrast to An Lanntair though, Art.tm engaged Gaelic language and culture 'only in so far as it reflected local culture'.⁷⁶

⁷³ Some of this sentiment may be inferred, for example, from the article *Print studio offers open access to all* (2006), Inverness Courier, published 7 July 2006 [Online]

⁷⁴ A. Sutherland (2014). Personal e-mail to the author

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Especially through our developing sense of a manner of engagement, something much more overtly Relational than our very object-based practice till then, which matched our experiences with the church space and allotments, we were very happy to consider this development of HICA; to see it as an experiment in these kinds of engagement and to push us to form a more visible organisation and public space, as an aspect of this.⁷⁷

0.18 The formulation of the experiment of HICA

Again, in hindsight, there seems some consistency here with De Barros' initial approach in establishing his furniture workshop; finding a somewhat neutral and business-like mode for engaging concrete and contemporary art concerns. This potential certainly matched our idea that the 'Highland Institute' might then, by way of a more official set-up, explore its concerns as something of a live experiment. A business-like detachment, and nature as an experiment, coupled with HICA's particular location, bring to mind Theo van Doesburg's comments on the nature of artistic procedure and of the artist's studio:

Doubtless there is much to learn from a medical laboratory. Do not artists' studios usually smell like monkey-houses? The studio of the modern painter must reflect the ambience of mountains which are nine-thousand feet high and topped with an eternal cap of snow. There the cold kills the microbes.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ There was no intention to 'take art to the people' or pursue particular community engagement, as some seem to have supposed, something that would have been counter to what was more the project's step back from such intentions, to consider the dilemmas noted previously, between uppers and lowers, art and objecthood, and also to look wider than this, to more basic dilemmas in relations to Nature. We expected, for instance, probable immediate perceptions in our local farming communities of our being "Erberts", simply through our interest in (particularly contemporary) art. Though it still remains basic to the project to consider how the work engages, seeing every response and involvement as part of the work. Other than this, and outside of HICA (as much as that is possible), we live as part of our local community in the way anyone might.

⁷⁸ J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.185

Our vantage point (though only around 800 feet high) might enable a clearer view of interactions with the 'discursive flow':⁷⁹ the particular arena of the project's engagement. This wider space of influence is, we have since realised, what was especially obscured in London. The greater clarity HICA's geographical position has enabled has reflected directly in our programme, and, it seems, in others' responses to that programme. All of which appears to demonstrate the worth to the project of this way of seeing its engagement, and of these developments, of the HICA space and organisation.

In these several ways then, Dalcrombie provided a practical space, and an as-neutral-as-could-be, while particularly relevant, context for the space. In addition, the nature of the actual space and location seemed ideal for the nature of the works: the inquiry into the Concrete: its isolation making its own nature as an artwork in-itself more apparent. To reflect again on Raymond Williams' comment at the start of my Foreword; it can be seen that there is almost endless play in the space: it is on a Highland estate, located in some fine scenery, so could be open to interpretation as desiring a romantic and idealised experience of Nature. But, it is also a rented cottage on a sheep farm, and thus also has a more immediate 'real' and down-to-earth involvement: it could be 'upper' or 'lower', Pastoral or Georgic.

Whichever; this rural location might at least suggest an interpretation of HICA as an anti-urban statement: HICA, as a country cottage, could desire to present the twee and nostalgic, though this does not appear to square with the space's concerns with the 'concrete'. This concrete concern might instead, in apparent opposition, recall the most functional aspects of International Modernism, its 'soulless repetition'.⁸⁰

This contrast of the quaint and the functional might, in-itself, then seem reminiscent of Jonathon Meades' discussion in *Jerry Building: Unholy Relics of Nazi Germany*, of some equivalent to the Völkisch being 'inextricably bound-

79 this term, used by Norman Bryson in N. Bryson, M. A. Holly, & K. Moxey, (Eds.) *Visual Theory*, p.71, I refer to in later discussions. I would note it here also in connection with a sense from Bourriaud of that which is '... open to dialogue, discussion, and that form of inter-human negotiation that Marcel Duchamp called "the coefficient of art", which is a temporal process, being played out here and now.' N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.41

80 *Jerry Building: Unholy Relics of Nazi Germany* (1994), 3.05mins

in with Nazism's doctrinaire rationalism...'⁸¹ (the Völkisch being '...something more than "folksy"'. It signifies that which grows from a particular patrimonial sod. It has connotations of tribe, breed, and racial exclusivity';⁸² the real root of Nazism's Blood and Soil mentality). Meades thus critically considers the two most identifiable Nazi architectural tendencies, the faux country cottage and the excessively functionalist and vast, through their mutual reliance on a twisted logic, something 'profoundly irrational'⁸³ that seeks to 'impose' an (often invented or imagined) past, on the present.

Meades, in his discussion, comments; 'Anti-urbanism is at best crankish, at worst; a springboard to horror'.⁸⁴ And here, accordingly, the HICA space may seem instead a study in bringing what Meades designates an 'urban' sensibility to bear on a rural situation: confronting both the quaint and functional in contemporary life, through employing the languages of these tendencies. (In this instance I would propose the cosmopolitan over the metropolitan, to reflect something more overtly seeking engagement with what might be universal: a sense that might sit well with Gere's earlier noting, of 'the expanded potential offered by new technological and social assemblages', while also suggesting HICA as an experiment in finding a new balance: where van Doesburg, for example, opposes the rural with the urban, as Nature is opposed by human spirit, despite their ultimate forming of a unity,⁸⁵ HICA might be seen to be inquiring into a more immediate and closely integrated form of this unity.)

Given the possibility of this articulation we have felt the space's procedures have something in common with Laibach's adopting of a totalitarian aesthetic. Slavoj Žižek notes, for instance, the question most commonly asked of Laibach, as being whether they are serious, or not?⁸⁶ In a comparison to HICA's situation this might translate to a questioning of our being urban or anti-urban; our sincerity in our considerations of Nature and our rural location: to what extent is this an idealist, or ironic positioning? Žižek discounts the questioning of Laibach's seriousness though, suggesting their subversion does not operate through ironic distance from their cultural context (he compares their situation in Slovenia to that in the

81 Ibid., 7.50mins

82 Ibid., 7.40mins

83 Ibid., 8.10min

84 Ibid., 8.50 mins

85 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.154

86 Upsidown13, (2009) *What the hell is Laibach all about?* [Online] 0.17 mins

United States, commenting that ironic distance is part of the ideology ‘of late capitalism in general’, and that it actually cannot thus be properly subversive).⁸⁷ In order to be subversive, he suggests, Laibach actually ‘take the system more seriously than it takes itself’,⁸⁸ by doing which they reveal the system’s ‘hidden transgressions’, transgressions that are actually an inherent part of the system.⁸⁹ He uses the example of the Southern United States in the 1920s to suggest the tacit acceptance of these ‘transgressions’ of a culture, such as the lynchings and beatings, the membership of the Klu Klux Klan, as necessary to being a full member of the culture.⁹⁰ Stating again that there have been other ways of conforming and transgressing in recent Slovenian culture⁹¹ he suggests that, rather than accept this kind of cynical relation, Laibach’s exaggerations instead bring to light these inherent transgressions, which ‘for the system to reproduce itself must remain hidden’.⁹² Thus the hypocrisy or contradictoriness of the culture as a whole is confronted. HICA’s being both country cottage and Concrete art-space, might then, by this, be some similar (if in milder form) confronting of the irrational logic of our current culture, the extent of its civilisation and necessary discontents, through its relations to the rural and functional; its own versions of sought-for idylls and underlying horrors (think of the countryside and meat production, for instance, or of messy human relationships in more isolated communities...).

HICA’s immediate relation to the context of the Inverness area would seem to further extend this sense, and the gallery’s manifestation of these kinds of contradictions. Inverness, a town which has experienced much recent growth, appears a great place for aspiring to all the mod-cons of contemporary life; having all the latest gadgets and goods available. Its growing sprawl of suburban housing, car-showrooms and retail parks, still though, especially for tourists, wishes to maintain some sense of vital connection to ‘wilderness’ and Nature. The goods in the shops may have all also felt the influence of International Modernism; design ideas originating from such places as the Bauhaus, or Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, and thus indicate some necessary engagement, somewhere along the line, with ideas of modern and contemporary art. But, it seems, so long as these things remain functional, as goods in Inverness’s shops, this is fine. To adapt Marinetti’s

87 Ibid., 0.35 mins

88 Ibid., 1.35 mins

89 Ibid., 2.18 mins

90 Ibid., 2.50 mins

91 Ibid., 3.00 mins

92 Ibid., 3.15 mins

statement; Inverness’s population (I’m sure, far from being alone in this) appear generally to aspire to the beautiful car *and* the Victory of Samothrace⁹³ (and to being able to enjoy both within a pristine natural environment).

The gallery space itself, at HICA, reflects all these potential positions. Essentially a found space, the steading conversion, while not exceptional in the area, is still quite grand, especially for those used to life in a flat in London or the Central Belt. It also remains connected to other farm buildings, meaning that just a few feet away related spaces are still used for their original purpose. While the space is superficially highly resolved, on close looking and greater familiarity it is quite awkwardly imposed onto the existing architecture. There is a resulting uneasiness in the space itself, which suits extremely well the flow of differing exhibitions and the flexibility this requires. It has a particular blend of plainness on all scales (we have discussed this, as a lack of ‘swagger’), despite its various impressive features. Thus, while it is a highly qualified space, providing immediate connection to numerous compelling contexts, it still, overall, permits a satisfyingly neutral presentation of artworks.

There are further particular aspects of the programme, as it has been devised, that more purposefully blur lines here between the space, its location and intentions: for instance, the dialogue between its isolation yet connectedness through technology; or between its somewhat ‘virtual’ nature due to this connectedness alongside its focus on ‘concrete’ artworks; or as Sarah Cook has commented, its enabling a discussion of the qualities of placelessness or sitedness directly in relation to exhibited works themselves.⁹⁴

All these elements contribute to making the space hard to place. That is, in comparison to what might be the positionings of in some ways comparable rural or ‘remote’ spaces in Scotland, such as Little Sparta, Moray Art Centre, Cairn Gallery, Jupiter Artland, Scottish Sculpture Workshop, or Taigh Chearsabhagh, that develop a more definitely identifiable ‘position’ through their form and architecture, our sense is that the Dalcrombie space manages a trick of remaining quite neutral, while also occupying possible dramatic extremes; a state that is

93 “... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace” – included in point 4 of *The Futurist Manifesto*: F. T. Marinetti (1909) *The Futurist Manifesto* [Online]

94 HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.30

absolutely fitting for the central thread of ideas explored through this thesis. Indeed, it seems that in many ways this uncertainty is what constitutes our 'stance', reflecting our experience of this positioning process, and sense from this of what is a good place to stand. This 'uncertain' positioning then also reflects in the overall 'questioning' stance of our programme, and our sense of the artworks we wish to show. For example, the title of the article by Moira Jeffrey on HICA, for The Scotsman newspaper, *Our Rural Riddle*, notably reflects this uncertainty and openness to differing interpretations.⁹⁵

0.19 The initial devising of HICA's programme

Therefore, I suggest, HICA, also in its relations to the Highlands and wider culture, occupies some as perfect as could be wished for, given its fairly chance development, contradictory state. As with my introductory comments in HICA's first publication; 'HICA's white-cube exhibition space both resists and connects with the surrounding landscape, placing works where they may be considered through equally contrasting aspects: culture and nature, the urban and rural, and at a further remove perhaps, the mind and body, content and form...'.⁹⁶ Here I further extend this through all my comments in this Introduction to suggest the nature of the space as exceptionally apt, given the project's intention to consider notions of Concrete Art, which in large part begin with van Doesburg and De Stijl's striving to achieve harmony and balance through working with apparently opposing aspects as counterparts.

The experimental nature of the gallery not only highlights the interactions of audience through all this, but also the presence and influence of each artist, especially their own positioning in response to the space; in such an uncertain relation, where do they place themselves? In devising the programme one overriding concern was to primarily host solo shows, to enable the influence or imprint of each artist to be seen more clearly and question how artists then respond to the space, to us, and to the overall set-up: how do they pitch themselves; as 'lower' or 'upper'; peasant, Lord of the Manor, or where (and how) in-between?

⁹⁵ M. Jeffrey, (2010) *Our Rural Riddle*, Scotland on Sunday, 18 July 2010, Review section, p.12

⁹⁶ HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.7

We had initiated the project at a time when we felt, in many ways, that we were not the best qualified or equipped, but determined that we should do what we could to be the 'workman of art'.⁹⁷ I mention this in order to explain our first intention, which was to primarily host others' discussions. We felt we had an interesting take on the ideas forming the core of the project, and hoped that through presenting these to others, they might then progress them. It has been a rather unexpected development, both challenging and confirming, that those we have worked with have generally, in the end, looked to us for their lead. And while many very welcome and significant contributions have been made, it has absolutely remained down to us to determine and develop the project's interest and direction.

The programme we originally devised saw one group show each year, with a series of related solo shows following on from this and focussing on four of the contributors to the group show. Discussions around each exhibition and a publication produced at the end of each year, incorporating something from these discussions in the form of commissioned essays, would enable development for the project.⁹⁸

We initially envisaged a specific lifespan of the project of five years. This provided a long enough period to conduct a thorough study, while it also maintained a sense of definite progression towards conclusions.⁹⁹ Over this time the programme's very particular format has had to evolve; to stay as light-on-its-feet as possible, and to be as flexible and responsive as a changing and developing programme, and precarious and minimal funding situation, might require.

⁹⁷ As Augusto de Campos comments on the new perceived role of the artist in Constructivism, in *Geraldo de Barros: Sobras em Obras*, (1999) 22.44mins

⁹⁸ Copies of HICA's five publications to-date are included here as Appendix C. All but the first of these have been produced during the period of this study.

⁹⁹ These programmes did indeed form quite a specific period of investigation, that the five-year time-frame fitted extremely well. Having successfully completed this investigative period, and realising the project's continuing interest, we continue to run HICA and develop its programmes, in-line now with a development of what we judge are its various (also developing) conclusions.

0.2 A Note on the Name

0.21 First ideas: reasons for using the word 'institute'

The idea for the project first started to take real shape after a particular discussion of areas of mutual 'concrete' interest with Richard Couzins, in late Summer 2007. It seemed that something extending that dialogue could be of real interest and benefit, to ourselves and others, and the idea of a gallery, as we had just the right space, was a good and obvious way to develop this. We were then, for the few months after that discussion, toying with the idea, and suggestions of what the space could be called came variously through this period.

To my recollection, we were keen to use the word 'institute' for slightly differing reasons. We (myself and Crumlish) had both taken part in one show at the Bart Wells Institute, an artist-run space in East London, and enjoyed the sense that the word 'institute', in this kind of artist-run context, gave. The Bart Wells Institute was a squatted former sweatshop, off Mare Street, that the artists Luke Gottelier and Frances Upritchard had run from 2001 to 2003. The space's 'crumbling' and 'shabby grandeur',¹⁰⁰ complemented very well the kinds of work shown, and the sense of that particular period. David Thorpe, who curated *The Fragile Underground*, the last show at Bart Wells, held from 1st February to 9th March, 2003, describes this as a 'Lo-Fi Modernist aesthetic'.¹⁰¹ The general tone of the space, in-keeping with Luke Gottelier's and artists' such as Brian Griffiths' (also involved in Bart Wells) presence within New Neurotic Realism¹⁰² maintained a post-YBA searching and reviewing of earlier modes of practice. This Lo-fi Modernism, keen to maintain humour perhaps, but to avoid irony, made the 'institute' seem positive and sincere even if in an absurd and overblown way. I feel this sense was also contained in our use of the word, but I would also not wish to suggest our usage was all that planned or calculating. We were also aware, for instance, of Patrick Brill's Leytonstone Centre for Contemporary Art (his garden shed and studio). Brill's was a more straightforwardly good-humoured institution. An art-space developed more in the manner of the National Theatre of Brent.

¹⁰⁰ descriptions by Sally O'Reilly and Brian Griffiths in L. Gottelier, et al (Eds.), *Bart Wells Institute*, pp.x and 39

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.121

¹⁰² both were in *The New Neurotic Realism* show at Saatchi Gallery in 1999

Crumlish was also happy that the name could be seen in relation to the institute envisaged by the eccentric oil baron Felix Happer at the end of the film *Local Hero*.¹⁰³ Very appropriately the film is set on the West Coast of the Highlands, where Happer's philanthropic decision to build an observatory to watch the stars, and an oceanic study centre (the Happer Institute), comes from his inability to procure all the land for his planned oil terminal. Indicating a stance HICA might align itself with, and certainly reflecting on its resources, it is Ben, the character living a hermitic existence on the beach he owns, who refuses to sell his land, and is thus, rather than Happer or the very pragmatic local villagers, the real spur to Happer's lofty gesture.

While this aspiration also seemed fine to me, I felt our loftiness (our being half-way up a Highland hillside) suggested also some Nietzschean interest; that in this way there really should be a Highland Institute for Contemporary Art as some Über art-space, a place that might uncompromisingly apply itself to consideration of what a contemporary art could be. Again van Doesburg's comment on the nature of the artist's studio and practice comes to mind, further reflecting on the nature of our intentions for this Institute, with its concern with concrete, and as Karl Gerstner has termed it, 'Cold Art'.¹⁰⁴ This lack of compromise might also suggest some parallel, if again in much quieter form, to Laibach and NSK's procedures.¹⁰⁵

0.22 The impulse towards research: the project's situating in relation to areas of concern

In this light I wish to suggest the whole HICA enterprise as being our own independent and spontaneous response to what we felt to be a problematic situation (I consider what exactly this problem might be in my first chapter, *Concrete Now!*, with the rest of this text seeking, as a reflection on HICA's programmes,

¹⁰³ *Local Hero* (1983)

¹⁰⁴ *Kalte Kunst?* was Gerstner's 1957 booklet outlining his sense of the history of Concrete Art. Its title 'became a common catchword, usually introduced into the conversation with scepticism': Margit Staber, in *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, p.81

¹⁰⁵ NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) are a Slovenian-based art collective that consists of Laibach, 'visual art collective IRWIN, performers Noordung, and graphic designers New Collectivism'. They also formed, in 1992, their own virtual and utopian micronation, State in Time. N. Thompson (Ed.), *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, pp.196-197

to determine possible solutions). This impulse might be related to other artist-led projects specifically making an effort of this kind, such as noted earlier with the space's organised by Julian Dashper in Auckland, and Jan van der Ploeg in Amsterdam. Though alongside these examples, of what are background activities in the contemporary art-world, I wish to also discuss here two more significant examples from recent art history; the New Tendencies, and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, interestingly positioned on either side of what Bourriaud has described as a struggle, through the Twentieth Century, '... between two visions of the world: a modest, rationalist conception, hailing from the 18th century, and a philosophy of spontaneity and liberation through the irrational (Dada, Surrealism, the Situationists)...'.¹⁰⁶ These examples, actually displaying some sympathies with both these 'visions', I note in order to highlight HICA's own intention towards reconciling these: our aim to discern a consistent basis to current practice in terms of a combined Concrete genealogy, incorporating aspects of what might be understood as the 'rational' and 'irrational', and our hope to articulate something through this that might further the dialogue overall.

First in this then, most clearly important in a reflection on current activity related to the concrete, the New Tendencies' own 'search for clarity'¹⁰⁷ might be noted; their wishing to act against the 'sterile' and 'mannered' in the art of the time (the early 1960s); their effort through which 'one sees... the refinements of Concrete Art or Constructivism, as well as hints of Tachism and ties to Neo-Dada'.¹⁰⁸

Regarding the second of these examples, Asger Jorn (the "Movement's" instigator), in 1957, asked, 'What is the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus? It is the answer to the question where and how to find a justified place for artists in the machine age. This answer demonstrates that the education carried out by the old Bauhaus was mistaken.'¹⁰⁹ Here, while emphasising the importance of the Bauhaus and the Bauhaus teachers, Jorn remains critical of what the school became,¹¹⁰ of subsequent developments (particularly the Ulm School), and of its

106 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.12

107 GRAV, New Tendencies pamphlet of 1962, quoted in G. Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution*, p.74

108 Ibid.

109 A. Jorn (1957) *Notes on the Formation of an Imaginist Bauhaus* [Online]

110 of interest here is his sympathetic noting of van Doesburg's problematic dialogue with the Bauhaus. A. Jorn (1956) *Opening Speech to the First World Congress of Free Artists in Alba, Italy* [Online]

teaching, claiming (similarly to Moholy-Nagy's comment noted earlier¹¹¹) that their methods result only in academicism or in an outdated sense of the artisanal,¹¹² both, in the terms of this discussion, problematic in their relation to craft, and thus to a sense of 'objecthood', and both requiring, in Jorn's view, to be superseded by 'the realm of the fine arts', and the industrial world.¹¹³ For Jorn it is art allied to science that offers ways to progress, and ways to be closer to the originating spirit of the Bauhaus: 'Artistic research is identical to "human science," which for us means "concerned" science, not purely historical science',¹¹⁴ a sense of research that also suggests a mode of artistic practice fitting to these aims: '...the Movement is promulgating the watchword of psychogeographical action'¹¹⁵ providing means not too distant from the New Tendencies' participatory involvements, while, as noted, coming from an opposite 'vision'.

Here, HICA's reconsidering of ideas of the concrete may be judged to position the project in dialogue with, and as coming after, the very wide range of differing concrete intentions, including those such as the 'concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life...' of the Situationists¹¹⁶ (of which Jorn was a founding member) as well as those seeking to innovate in the area of Concrete Art, such as the New Tendencies.

Doing this through a 'live' experiment, of a (perhaps understated) Relational project, suggests HICA's development from this point as a negation of any intention toward a *more* concrete existence, such as the escaping from the spectacular sought by the Situationists. Bourriaud, for instance, discusses the divergence of Situationism and the Relational in his note *Relational aesthetics and constructed situations*,¹¹⁷ where he is critical of Situationist understandings of social relations, suggesting they consider these only in terms of 'capitalist forms of exchange',¹¹⁸ for which they seek a more *real* alternative:

111 See section 0.14

112 A. Jorn (1956) *Opening Speech to the First World Congress of Free Artists in Alba, Italy* [Online]

113 Ibid.

114 A. Jorn (1957) *Notes on the Formation of an Imaginist Bauhaus* [Online]

115 Ibid.

116 K. Stiles & P. Selz (Eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, p.704

117 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp.84-85

118 Ibid.

...the Situationist theory overlooks the fact that if the spectacle deals first and foremost with forms of human relations (it is “a social relationship between people, with imagery as the go-between”), it can only be analysed and fought through the production of new types of relationships between people.¹¹⁹

Thus HICA would understand the ‘psychogeographical’ as involved with the human and Relational, while necessarily also involved with whatever the ‘concrete’ might then be understood to be; something that in some way relies on the material and, thus it seems also inevitably (and will later be argued), the universal.

Given these examples then, I wish to suggest the relevance for ourselves of Jorn’s call, if adapted perhaps to a sense of HICA’s own subsequent positioning:

We merely wish to state that world-wide progress in the realms of art and technology has resulted in so much formal confusion that the founding of an INSTITUTE OF ARTISTIC EXPERIMENT AND THEORY, on a par with the scientific institutes, beyond professional, artistic or industrial problems of an academic kind, imposes itself with enormous urgency. The founding of the Institute is our precise and direct aim.¹²⁰

Jorn claims the first such institute as ‘the experimental laboratory for free artistic research founded 29 September 1955 at Alba.’¹²¹ ‘This type of laboratory is not an instructional institution; it simply offers new possibilities for artistic experimentation.’¹²²

0.23 Why ‘The Highland Institute for *Contemporary Art*’?

Eilidh Crumlish first suggested the space’s name in its full form, which, once mouthed, fairly instantly stuck, and actually proved such a strong focus that it seemed to form our thinking and the practical side of things around it (an example of what I will later discuss as the ‘hunger of form’, a phrase from Haroldo de

119 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp.84-85

120 A. Jorn (1956) *Op. Cit.*

121 A. Jorn (1957) *Notes on the Formation of an Imaginist Bauhaus* [Online]

122 Ibid.

Campos’ poem *Cristal Forma*); a concretizing effect seeming to drive the appropriate manifestation. Our thinking before this had been very vague in many ways, but once we had the name, we knew we were definitely going to run the project.

Noting Jorn’s comments on an Imaginist Bauhaus might give some indications as to why this was then to also be the Highland Institute for *Contemporary Art*. The ‘H’ ICA might naturally be some Highland outpost, having some aims equal to those of the ICA in London. Those who had formed the ICA sought to meet a need for a museum of modern art for London, though the record of this development states they ‘resisted’ the term modern in favour of ‘contemporary’.¹²³ It is suggested that this change was largely due to the input of the French avant-garde film-maker Jacques Brunius.¹²⁴ Brunius’s Surrealist involvements,¹²⁵ within a group that also included such other figures notably sympathetic to Surrealism as Roland Penrose, might indicate this choice of terminology as part of dialogues and oppositions elsewhere, between Surrealist artists and those committed to the New art; other more purposefully ‘modern’ tendencies, such as the Constructivists: for example, the competition between groups such as Cercle et Carre and the Surrealists in Europe through the 1920s and ‘30s.¹²⁶ The judgment of ‘contemporary’ as more appropriate to the intentions of what became the ICA suggests a distance from the rational, and an allying to a more open sense of possibilities, befitting an experimental space. Herbert Read is quoted as saying, at the time of the gallery’s first exhibition, *40 Years of Modern Art: a Selection from British Collections*:

Such is our ideal - not another museum, another bleak exhibition gallery,

123 Institute of Contemporary Arts, *history* [Online]: ‘the Institute of Contemporary Arts resisted an initial impulse to become a Museum of Modern Art for London, preferring instead to position itself at the forefront of art and culture.’

124 ‘Brunius was instrumental in changing its name’, From *Fifty Years of the Future: A chronicle of the Institute of Contemporary Arts*, (1998), p.3

125 See *Jacques B. Brunius papers, 1929-1967* [Online] for a brief biography of Brunius.

126 See, for instance, W. Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts*, p.130; Margit Staber in *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, p.81, or, for further example, Greenberg’s comments in *Surrealist Painting*, in J. O’Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.230, where modern art, the ‘tradition of painting that runs from Manet, through Impressionism, fauvism, and cubism’ is under threat from Surrealists, Neo-Romantics and Magic Realists: ‘These painters, though they claim the title of avant-garde artists, are revivers of the literal past and advance agents of a new conformist, and best-selling art.’

another classical building in which insulated and classified specimens of a culture are displayed for instruction, but an adult play-centre, a workshop where work is a joy, a source of vitality and daring experiment. We may be mocked for our naive idealism, but at least it will not be possible to say that an expiring civilisation perished without a creative protest.¹²⁷

It is interesting to reflect then that our own sense of need here, our own sympathies, were also met, ultimately, by the term 'contemporary'. This choice in naming HICA, highlighting its sense of humour but also intention toward experiment, might also immediately give some contrary indication, of the less rational and more investigative, within our own consideration of the Concrete.

A contemporaneous development with the establishing of the ICA in London, the Institute of Modern Art in Boston changing their name to the 'Institute of Contemporary Art', prompted Clement Greenberg to voice his concern and dismay. He saw it as an abandonment of progressive art, and a 'regressive step aiming at populism',¹²⁸ more than an attempt, as the Institute stated, to 'proclaim standards of excellence which the public may comprehend'.¹²⁹ The wider significance of this one-word change reverberated around the art-world of the time. Others were more alarmist than Greenberg, seeing this change as reeking of institutional control and censorship, and comparing it to 'Hitler's systematic suppression of [the] avant-garde...'¹³⁰

Providing an again alternative development of the term 'contemporary', Charles Esche comments on his and Pavel Büchler's first inquiries into the origins of the term, suggesting 'it seems that this term dates back to pre-revolutionary Russia when it was connected to an idea of socially or politically progressive art, rather than simply 'modern art' which is what people do at a particular moment in time.'¹³¹ Esche thus sees potential to restore a link between the contemporary and

127 in *Fifty Years of the Future: A chronicle of the Institute of Contemporary Arts*, (1998), p.4

128 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.218

129 Ibid., p.217

130 Tate, *Ellsworth Kelly*, p.68

131 J. Vesić (2004) *About Exhibitions, Modest Proposals and Possibilities: An Interview with Charles Esche* [Online]

progressive, something he would be 'very happy to encourage because it would also start to draw a line between different aspects of the modern art world.'¹³²

These various points I intend to indicate some knowing usage on our part of the word 'contemporary', that notes this problematic nature and its attendant discussions. In these, HICA remained fundamentally focussed around a sense of a still developing modernism, though desired some significant inquiry into its basis, providing perhaps more complex understandings, especially appropriate to the current context of a generalised and globalised 'contemporary' art. Perhaps either word could have been chosen, but 'Modern' may also have been too easily pigeon-holed, limiting the perceptions of the work we were considering, particularly important in relation to the visibility of our concern with the Concrete. We have had a few instances of people calling us the Highland Institute for *Concrete* Art, which would also seem a great thing to have, and perhaps would be the real Über space. Though this has seemed too particular to be properly viable (I'd feel that it certainly would have been at the outset of the project), while it also loses a large part of its sense of humour.

'Contemporary' thus remains... interestingly contested... in terms of the values it suggests; in itself, just the kind of area the project wished to delve into. Here the fact that this ICA was housed in a farm steading seemed highly appropriate, and absolutely consistent with the contradictory sense through the various aspects of the space so far outlined.

We had, on establishing HICA, noted other gallery's difficulties in more clearly defining exactly what kind of contemporary art they show. For most sizeable institutions this was most commonly qualified as some form of *international* contemporary art. A quick current survey suggests that this has shifted now, back to either no qualification, or, if in some way still 'international', to a description as

132 Ibid., Pavel Büchler has commented on this initial research: '... the term "contemporary" in relation to literature (and by extension, in relation to art) originates with Pushkin and his journal "Sovremennik" ("The Contemporary"). It was associated with "revolutionary propaganda", particularly after 1848, and in late 19th century Russia the connotations of the term were similar to what you could perhaps call today "socially/politically engaged". It seems that this was also to some extent the case when the term re-emerged and became used more widely in the 1920s and '30s although I cannot say if there is any direct historical connection.' P. Büchler (2014) Personal e-mail to the author.

'world class' contemporary art.¹³³ On opening a contemporary art space in the Highlands, we have found, a need for some kind of clarification quickly becomes apparent: it could appear that the Highlands is well resourced in terms of contemporary art, with many galleries catering for a contemporary art audience, and with many practitioners of contemporary art happy to announce themselves as such. These uses recall to my mind a stand-up comedian's routine I heard on the radio, reflecting on the over-use of the term contemporary. Regarding the term 'contemporary cuisine' for instance, he asked, who would want anything else? This phenomenon of desiring a certain cachet from being 'cutting-edge', very inadequately masks a disinterest in anything actually troublesome or avant-garde; very reminiscent of Greenberg's comments noted earlier¹³⁴ regarding Surrealism, but here, now, applicable to the use of the term 'contemporary'. While not wanting to disparage anyone's need to make a living, this promotion of just the 'recent', as with some of the above comments, highlights the more significant dangers still very present in the usage of the term.

0.24 HICA's local political context, and our finding ways to proceed...

Thus the HICA was inaugurated, alongside the various suggestions here already made, through a genuine desire for such a space that might truly engage questions of contemporary art. In some ways we offered our project as a model: a small-scale version of some larger, future gallery. Such a gallery, properly resourced, could be a great thing. HICA, in this way, was an entirely sincere name for the space; something that might again express a 'hunger of form', that might result in this future space, or play a part at least in whatever necessary broader cultural change might be required to make this envisioned space possible.

A question that might well be forming at this point, and does need addressing, though rather reluctantly on my part, regards the rather messier end of this whole business. As such, its consideration is perhaps best kept as brief as possible:¹³⁵ why, given our positive intentions, our ability to set-up and run effectively with

133 i.e. the DCA describes itself as a 'world-class centre for the development and exhibition of contemporary art and culture' <http://www.dca.org.uk/about/index.html> and 'world class contemporary art' is used by the Fruitmarket Gallery <http://fruitmarket.co.uk/> (both accessed January 2014)

134 See note 117 in section 0.23

135 or if not, another thesis could be undertaken...

minimal support, and to support the programme we have over a sustained period, has there not been further involvement from local bodies or organisations, especially in the light of the very positive conversations we had before establishing the space, that might possibly have enabled, perhaps not this future dream-space, but some further step towards it? Here it needs to be said that in terms of local politics this project has been difficult - very difficult, at times (where the name for the space may have counted against us...). We have instead found other routes to sustain the project's very positive progress through its programme and wider national and international audiences: it has largely been the feedback from these audiences, those who have travelled specifically to visit the space and those locally who have been both interested and supportive, that have bolstered HICA's development, helping it avoid possible derailments and pit-falls. Suffice otherwise to say, the particular positive local dialogues prior to our opening came to a very abrupt end at the moment of HICA's opening, and we have not been able to engage in dialogues of that sort since.

Having considered spaces faring better and worse in terms of local politics, such as An Lanntair, Taigh Chearsabhagh and Art.tn, it was clear to us that what would enable the space to be significantly developed would be support from such bodies as the local council. No direct conversation with council representatives about HICA has ever been possible, and instead of this pursuit we have aimed to maintain our independence and focus on our artistic aims (something that our location has particularly made possible), feeling that if anything might garner future support, then it would be the nature of this focus, and our programme. Again, noting the importance of context, we would accept that no complete separation from this political world is ever possible, or indeed desirable. As I will go on to mention, we are in some agreement with Christo's description of contemporary art as a '...very deep political, social, economical experience I live right now, with everybody...' ¹³⁶ However, in accord with Christo and Jean-Claude's procedures, and also with the example I will later include of Norman Bryson's discussion of the 'political' power of Manet's *Olympia* (something that is more subtle than the direct affecting of social change, it instead acts through 'microscopic and discrete' moments of local change¹³⁷), this 'very deep' experience appears to only be appropriately engaged, through art, somewhat obliquely.

136 Christo & Jeanne-Claude, *Running Fence* (1977), 15.38mins

137 In N. Bryson, M. A. Holly, & K. Moxey (Eds.) *Visual Theory*, p.70

Liam Gillick has commented on the particular ethnic mix of contemporary artists discussed by Bourriaud, those of Cuban, Algerian, Irish, and Thai heritage, whose diversity forms ‘... a group whose complex and divided family histories have taught them to become sceptical shape-shifters in relation to the dominant culture in order to retain, rather than merely represent, the notion of a critical position.’¹³⁸

We would accept here that our intentions, our positions as artists, and HICA’s, as an artist-run space, may be difficult to accommodate politically: this would be a part of the point of the project, its cultural ‘Catch 22’; its open question that effectively presents the dilemma of being as part of the mainstream, or flowing against the tide. And while not wanting to dwell on these, what have been real problems, they are, in a way, indicative of what the project is about: the testing out of positions, how meanings and values are perceived and understood, how our actions shape culture. Thus alongside all in the forthcoming chapters a note might be made that this was against the backdrop of what have been on-going difficulties. I discuss in this text the exploring of systems, or the idea of games with ‘concrete rules’ provided by the environment, to determine what is possible. Here these things have played their part as context for the project, where solutions, it seems of necessity, are never pretty or easy, but are hard fought.

I would note that these issues have gone nearly entirely unspoken with artists taking part in the project. It has been a difficult question for ourselves as to how much these factors should play a part in the experiment of the space and shows. Certainly some of the shows have been given greater poignancy through this backdrop, and there seems a general, if again unspoken, acknowledgement or expectation from contributing artists that their projects will be understood to be against some backdrop of this kind.

Here we have been reminded of Christo and Jean Claude’s *Running Fence* project and the 1977 film documenting it. *Running Fence*, was their 1972-76 project in Sonoma and Marin counties, in California. The film follows the problematic development and realisation of the piece, including negotiations with land-owners, court hearings and injunctions. Christo comments:

The work is not only the fabric, the steel poles and the fence. The art

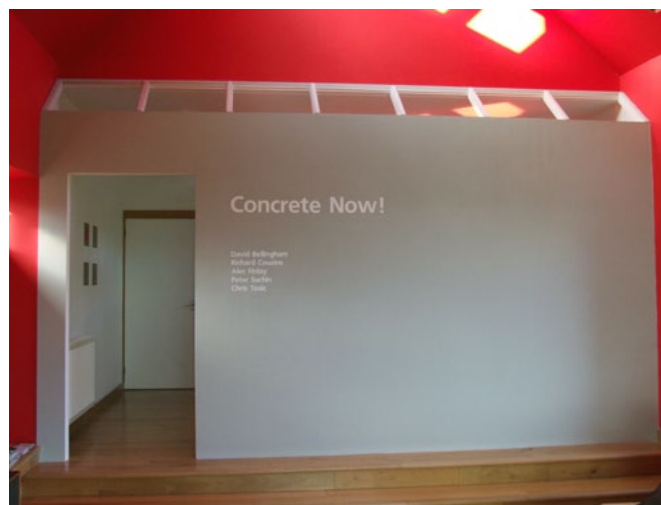
¹³⁸ L. Gillick (2006) *Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop’s “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics”* October magazine, Winter 2006, pp.95-107 [Online]

project is right now, here. Everybody here is part of my work. If they want or if they don’t want, anyway, they are a part of the work. Instead to have colour, of red or white, they are integral part of this process of making that project. I believe very strongly that Twentieth Century art is not a single individualistic experience. It is the very deep political, social, economical experience I live right now, with everybody here. There is nothing involved with the make-believe. That appeal was not staged for me, that we have emotion and... er... fear. But of course that is a part of my project. I like very much to live the real life. It is a little bit like expedition – going to the Himalaya or New Guinea. And of course, in the end I... I think its beautiful. Perhaps some people, some friends will think its beautiful. Some people will think its [atrocious?] but I believe strongly its beautiful because the fabric is woven nylon, is a conductor of the light, and with the sunset it will have the incredible ribbon of light traversing through all these fences.¹³⁹

The nature of the film and some of the attitudes within it throw up doubts on all this now: Christo and Jean-Claude have large sums of money to spend locally, which helps, while their manner of approach is more directly challenging and imposing of itself. These overt interventions HICA might see as problematic aspects, which at the least suggest the ‘political, social, economical experience’ is more subtly nuanced, and engineered, than the film portrays.

But still, we had watched this a few years before we moved from London and I remember being quite struck by it. This was around the time of our consideration of the allotment site and the church space, where it definitely played a part in forming ideas, indicating ways it might be possible to proceed.

¹³⁹ Christo & Jeanne-Claude, *Running Fence* (1977), 15.38mins



Construction of the initial HICA space, 2008

1 Concrete Now!

When the recent vanguard movement in poetry named itself concrete, it was not pejoratively attempting to suggest that all poems composed before it were abstract... In a general sense, all poets, from Homer through Dante, to Baudelaire or Eliot, are concrete; even the most innocent of the provincial bards.¹

1.1 HICA's opening exhibition: *Concrete Now!*

24 August – 28 September, 2008

(David Bellingham, Richard Couzins, Alec Finlay, Peter Suchin, Chris Tomic)

Alongside its consideration of what might constitute current Concrete Art activity, this exhibition declares a concrete sense of 'now' (2008). Grounded in an awareness of the history of the Concrete Art movement and its various off-shoots; Concrete Poetry, Concrete Music and the more heterogeneous groupings it influenced, such as Nouveaux Réalistes, Arte Povera, MAC, Fluxus, Minimalists etcetara, each work in the show is open to concrete interpretation. As a group, the pieces combine in various ways to suggest further understandings. These allow reflections on the nature of the space, the gallery's location and its wider context. Investigating the processes that cause these connections and, ultimately, why the show is the way it is, in the place it is, becomes the work of the exhibition.²

These comments I made as part of information relating to HICA's opening show, and may be taken to represent the real starting-point of the project. They consider the exhibition as a reflection of all these starting conditions, the works we wished or were able to include, and our particular resources. We had been in close discussion with Peter Suchin, Richard Couzins and Chris Tomic about the project, then further invited Alec Finlay and David Bellingham to take part in the show. This reflects the discursive nature of our programme: mostly including those we have been in dialogue with about the ideas of the space.

¹ From *Straight, Direct, Concrete*, 1962, by José Luis Grunewald, in J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.94

² HICA, *Concrete Now!* Exhibition, on HICA website, h-i-c-a.org [Online]

The works included in this opening show were very modest in scale, HICA in its first incarnation being just the smaller partitioned space at the back of what is now the larger gallery. Though Finlay's piece, a bird-box, part of his *Home to a King* project, was placed in the tree outside the space's largest window, where it has stayed since, demonstrating how from the start HICA and our exhibitions have looked beyond the gallery space.

Following our plan, from this group, four of the five artists were then to have solo exhibitions over the course of the next year.³

In the absence of commissioned writers or contributors to a discussion or symposium (features of our later programme), to commence proceedings I wrote brief texts on each work, which were placed on HICA's website. To open the dialogue here in this thesis, I include these brief texts, to better present a sense of the initial form of the project: these pieces may reflect how the show was 'the way it is, in the place it is' and provide some insight into how the works made connections; between each other, and with the ideas of the project.⁴

1.11 Exhibition texts

David Bellingham:

David Bellingham presents an arrangement of 6" rulers, each dipped in black enamel paint from depths of 1" through to 6". The size of ruler used suggests a quite delicate craft, not rocket-science perhaps but still something skilled and precise, the steel implies a proper technical quality. The strict arrangement, the exact height to each hanging-nail (62") and distance between each ruler (1") reinforce their seriousness, but there is also something toy-like in the over-all scale; the rulers 'dinkier' than the more familiar 12" ruler, and the whole piece, taken together, reflects

³ Alec Finlay's exhibition became a joint show with Alexander and Susan Maris. Chris Tomic did not have a solo exhibition, due to his being a member of HICA: this precluded his work from being a focus of the programme (a condition of our funding at the time).

⁴ Each text was checked with the artists. There were only a few small changes made, mostly to Alec Finlay's text, after his suggestions. Texts available at HICA, *Concrete Now!* Exhibition, on HICA website, *h-i-c-a.org* [Online]

something almost musical; the measured paint, a scale of notes. The notes these rulers would sound would be of a higher pitch than the 12" ruler; the gently sprung pins of a music-box perhaps. This sense may be developed; the piece seems to work from left to right, and, as with a piano keyboard, plays from a lower to a higher note; an ascending scale. If we imagine filling a container, of similar proportions to the rulers, with paint, then we would expect to hear an equivalent raising of pitch. *Dipped Rules* tinkers with our associations with form and material, and gives space to reflections on the 'how and why' of these processes.

David Bellingham, *Dipped Rules*, 2008

Is the world potentially, in all ways, measurable? Or are some things immeasurable? Is the question how we measure, what scale we employ to translate things? We may measure the wavelengths of notes, for example, but what of the effects of music? To what degree does measuring lead to greater knowledge and understanding of something in the world? In declaring the depths of paint as increments of 1" the piece, at the same time, points up the arbitrariness of this decision, (why not 1cm?) and highlights inches as something makeshift; they are a 'handy' length, useful in human terms. Do they relate to anything of more universal value? *Dipped Rules* explores competing tendencies, between a human desire for more objective measure (the rulers) and more 'unruly' stuff, which, slipping away from its mark, (and, it would seem, having to be filled-in to the desired depth) paints a different picture.

Richard Couzins:

Richard Couzins
Stills from *Unovercryable*, 2008

Unovercryable is a short (3 minute) video by Richard Couzins, shot in Archway, North London. Images of the street are cut so as to connect with a woman's voice. The images are overlaid, manipulated or effected to emphasise their various relations to her commentary; sometimes clear and overt, sometimes more subtle and tenuous, to the point where we may ask whether they were intended or not, have we formed them ourselves? The narration highlights and in itself reflects this questioning, discussing both the direct and the more accidental or serendipitous connections, offering thoughts on the nature of our understandings alongside observations of street life. The effect of the accumulated images and commentary is a dislocation from our usual recognition of the things on the screen, with thoughts provoked as direct responses to statements made and more fluid musings on the perhaps plastic and amorphous nature of what we generally perceive as solid and certain. *Unovercryable* draws out the formal languages of shape and colour, and

connects these with the sounded shape and colour of words, slipping from recognisable sense to more rhythmic and tonal phrases, suggestive of music. We are placed in a synaesthetic state, an area (in our heads? in the gallery?) where the senses overlap. Phrases such as "Look at the music and do what it says." or "These images are in my voice." propose a more fundamental 'music' shaping that which we generally perceive. Glimpses of this music may be possible, but the realm in which it operates generally seems tantalisingly out of reach, "The sign is saturated with something that will not come out." If the title refers to a concept of fundamental reason giving sense to other more inexplicable phenomena, (Kant's 'voice of reason that will not be silenced') then perhaps the suggestion here is that reason might be found to have less in common with science-fact and be more akin to music, that is, it might not correspond to some internal structure, but rather may be more a function of external organisation?

Alec Finlay:

Narrow and Crimson (5) by Alec Finlay is a nest-box and crossword clue, or poem, part of the larger *Home to a King (3)* project. The nest-box is a readymade, a regular, fully-functioning box that will become a home. The rowan tree, embedded in its natural environment, presents a striking sense of 'at-home-ness', heightened by this small secret addition. The particular fitting-ness of this tree in this landscape presents not just an adequate fit, not a makeshift 'it'll do' home, but a sense of something truly belonging. One thinks of the tradition of the rowan at the door, and the many Highland homes that lie empty.

What do we make of the intrusion of the crossword clue into this scene? We may wonder about the solution. Do we need to know the solution to 'get' the artwork? In considering what is present as concrete meaning we might discount a particular need for such information; it is not the solution that is required but rather the idea of crossword clues and our own responses to them that inform an understanding. The idea of the 'clue' and therefore also the puzzle, reflects instead on the scene: that the bird

will fit with the box, as the box with the tree, the tree with the landscape, and so on, all linking in an analogous way to a puzzle coming together. (The solution to this particular clue, as you might expect, complements this understanding and reinforces the relations in question.) The use of crossword clues could frame this as a leisure-time activity, but the nest-box is more than leisure-time to its inhabitant. It may be life or death, continued existence. We might conclude then that the clue is a contrary way to introduce a graver theme; that this puzzle comes together only in a more necessary and fundamental way, the relationships between the various elements essentially symbiotic, each linking to form a whole. In observing we may consider that we are also part of this same scene, and as such, we are afforded the opportunity to reflect on our own connection to this puzzle.

Alec Finlay, *Narrow and Crimson (5)*, 2008

Peter Suchin:

Peter Suchin's *Museum of the Vexed Text (eight-card extract)* presents excerpts from a twenty-year period of note-taking. Viewing these annotations might bring to mind our own similar notes, desks of clutter, revised diaries, lists of things to do, and suggest their presentation as a portrait of a particular personality. We might consider that, as any

production appears to bear the stamp of its creator, so in any artwork traces of the artist's 'all-over-signature' may be found. The cause of the vexed-ness of these texts might be the angst felt by Suchin in his daily life and the consequent difficulty of this inquiry into his personality.

Peter Suchin, *Museum of the Vexed Text (Eight-card Extract)*, 2008

In showing these in a gallery context the artist sets up a dilemma for the audience, are these genuine or not? Firstly, is he (what we perceive as the personality) genuine? Do we expect that if we were to meet Suchin that he would in some way, on some level, resemble these notes, such that the person and the product seem a 'true' match? Secondly, are the notes genuine? The accompanying text states that the 'fiches' (the card of choice) are chosen partly for their aesthetic appeal, suggesting that this same appeal might very well also influence the notes themselves. Do the materials modify his approach? Does the thought that the card may one day be displayed? Perhaps the piece is exploring something analogous to the Uncertainty Principle in physics; proposing that the setting-up of an experiment is enough in itself to effect the results; better experiments may be devised to minimise any influence, but there will always be some residual effect. There is always some noise, some subjective 'uncertainty' in our attempts to picture reality. Maybe this is where the vexation enters in: from the corner of our eye we see everyday scattered bits and pieces effortlessly settle into 'genuine' formations, but attempts to reproduce these invariably get entangled with our ego.

Rather than these possible interpretations the 'vexed-ness' here seems to result from the notes' accepting of their necessarily self-conscious and aestheticised state, whilst they also attempt to address these various concerns, assert a position, suggest a way to be. That is, if the notes, in concrete terms, are a presentation of meaning, then rather than picture reality they, in this display, present us with a reality, where each incidental mark becomes an active exploration of possible values, possible understandings.

Chris Tasic:

Chris Tasic, *Untitled Logical Forms*, 2008

Chris Tasic's *Untitled Logical Forms* (the title referring to Wittgenstein's analysis of forms underlying language) are at first sight a collection of small-scale non-representational paintings. Closer inspection reveals too precise lines, too sharp corners and a mechanically smooth finish, which suggests they have, at least largely, been printed. They could be the product of a home computer. This effectively updates the work from what might be original Constructivist, De Stijl or Bauhaus images, to those same, regurgitated by our current, possibly sterile and consumer lead, culture.

The pieces readily connect with their surroundings. The radiator in the HICA gallery, the result of the use of a domestic space, echoes immediately *Untitled Logical Form 5* for instance, suggesting a more Duchampian interest. The space itself is a 'modern conversion': a type of modern design imposed onto older farm buildings. The images seem to ally themselves with the fate of the building, and almost disappear into their surroundings, taking on the mantle of mass-produced art; the art of IKEA, B&Q, Argos even. In this way they present themselves as compromised things, but in a gallery context, perhaps suggest this as an opportunity, an opportunity to consider what is good and desirable about their state, and what isn't, as there are better and worse aspects to the space they inhabit. Connecting all this with Wittgenstein might be proposing that the process underlying language, in this case a language of interior design as well as painting, is a much more complex issue than an idea of 'logical forms' might imply. It may be based on a muddle of imperfect individual understandings, taking ideas forward over time, a thought perhaps more in tune with Wittgenstein's later ideas of meaning-as-use. If we consider how many conversations are taking place at any one time, how frequently words are employed, we can see what an enormously complicated process the slow incremental shaping of language appears to be.

The opportunity then is perhaps to reflect on how we judge the use of words or images. It is these judgements as they appear to each individual, which are the material of the work.

1.12 Note on the remainder of the text, and consideration of exhibitions

The remainder of this chapter, and the following chapters, work chronologically through HICA's exhibitions, each chapter reflecting on a year of the gallery's programme, as these quite naturally follow our developing inquiry, supported, as it was, by discussions and commissioned texts accompanying all the central shows (the four main exhibitions in a year, that formed the core of our programme, focussed on in publications). Each year's programme also led, as organically as could be maintained, into the next, though I would note that at every stage we were required to juggle with what were very limited resources. We, on the whole, have pushed this as far as we have felt able: we have acted on what was possible at the time, rather than match a progression of an overall argument as might be required in a written thesis at some point in the future... Reflecting on this now, there seems a very pleasing degree of coherence, especially thinking back to some of the circumstances we have worked through, though there still remains an unavoidably loose fit between how the exhibitions, in the end, worked out, and the various aspects of historical interest which this text also aims to draw out, and draw upon, in order to construct a useful study. As a result I have at times disrupted the chronological order of shows within each chapter, in order to aid the clarity of the discussion.

I feel it right to also note that the paralleling of these two developments here, the historical and theoretical inquiry and our exhibition programme, does not indicate a necessary sense of progression in the works that HICA exhibited. There is, of course, independence between these lines of development and the works of the individual artists. The artists comprising the beginning, middle and end of our programme work with their own concerns, and are only temporarily framed within the context of this discussion. There is the problem of all that I might want to discuss being simultaneously present in any one of the exhibitions: the aim to construct a developing argument requires that instead only those aspects, at useful points within this structure, are focussed on.

HICA's programme was devised in a 'felt' way; determining each annual series and developing from one show to the next a sense of what seemed right, relating to discussions and ideas at the time, almost as in the way of a painting; adding areas of colour (a compositional manner very relevant to later discussion, though an approach, in-itself, questioned as part of the project). Our sense of the success

of this, in this first year, led to this method's more conscious application through the subsequent years. That is, our awareness of this developed as an aspect of our inquiry, of asking what informs this sense (building on our more 'intuitive' start, again, also highly relevant to the discussion); finding ways to navigate to areas we wished to explore further while aiming to always take, what felt to us, the most interesting routes.

In this first chapter, while broadly presenting works that, as with HICA's opening *Concrete Now!* show, can be taken to indicate a slice of 'now' (2008-2009) it has seemed most useful to also relate these to a developing thread of argument in Modernism, exploring, as very limited space allows, what might constitute and characterise this, and how these contemporary works, that is, a range of current practice through which to consider the project's questions, may be seen to relate to, develop from, its beginnings. Here I seek to provide sufficient detail to be clear on what are the various aspects of the argument, and to establish the basic elements that may be necessary to a developing formulation of ideas. (Through all chapters, for reasons of space and clarity, I have limited this to only a very few points in the argument per exhibition, and given only the briefest accounts of the exhibitions themselves.)

These four (and with the additional exchange of exhibitions with PS space, Amsterdam, making six) exhibitions through this first year, act also as a statement of the problem to be considered; the reason for this study. While these shows are positive presentations of works in-themselves (works judged to engage relevant interests), and there may be more or less satisfaction for their makers in their individual pursuits, they also, we perceive, present an overall sense of something dissatisfactory; something that the artists are seeking to grapple with and are perhaps frustrated in their attempts to progress. Our first intentions with HICA were to question particularly British manifestations of this problem, to discuss and reflect, as something of a shared enterprise with contributors, what this problem might be, and what might be possible, if not solutions, then at least developments. This naturally led to consideration of this state of affairs in a more international context, as with these PS exhibitions. Over the subsequent years it has become very apparent that this international context does not just provide helpful perspective, but a necessary element in the argument itself, relating especially to the possibly universal nature of much of what is being discussed.

A practical note, important in describing the nature of these exhibitions, is that our first solo show, with Peter Suchin, expanded out from what we had originally envisaged as the small project space, to the larger adjacent space. All subsequent shows through this first year successively grew into this larger space, (and variously engaged other spaces, such as HICA's garden and surroundings) such that, for the start of our 2010 programme, considered in the next chapter, we took the decision to re-paint and include this larger space as equally a part of the, now expanded, HICA gallery.

1.2 Exchange of exhibitions between HICA and PS:

Concrete Now! Introducing PS: 23 August – 27 September 2009

(Julian Dashper, Michelle Grabner, Gerold Miller, John Nixon,
Jan van der Ploeg, Tilman)

HICA, as arranged: 17 January – 28 February, 2010

(David Bellingham, Richard Couzins, Thomson + Craighead,
Alec Finlay, Geoff Lucas, Alexander and Susan Maris, Peter Suchin)

1.21 The relation of the HICA project to the tradition of Concrete Art

I begin here though not with Peter Suchin's exhibition (the first chronologically), but with the exchange of shows between HICA and PS, Amsterdam, as although these came after the four shows that made up our main programme, through 2008-2009, they introduce the historic identification, the generally accepted understanding of Concrete Art, developing from the influence of Theo van Doesburg's *Manifesto for Concrete Art* on Max Bill, and Bill's and others' interpretations and developments in carrying this forward. They thereby give necessary contextualisation for the rest of the discussion.

Noting a resurgence of interest in Concrete Art,⁵ Museum Haus Konstruktiv's 2010/2011 project, *Complete Concrete*, a survey exhibition and publication focussed within this tradition, notes the lack of a comprehensive study of 'the connection between contextual art of the 1980s and '90s, and Concrete,

5 Museum Haus Konstruktiv, *Complete Concrete*, p.11

Conceptual Art since the beginning of the twentieth century...'.⁶ Margit Staber, in the same publication, refers to Willy Rotzler's 1977 book, *Constructive Concepts*, as 'the first and most extensive study of the movement from Cubism until the mid-1970s'.⁷ Additional to Rotzler's concerns, and demonstrating the difficulty in seeing the edges of this area, Haus Konstruktiv has from its establishment, in 1986, also incorporated the conceptual alongside the concrete and constructivist.⁸ Here the conceptual is judged a consistent part of a rational art⁹ in which "invisible, abstract thought becomes concrete, tangible...",¹⁰ the opposite of irrational tendencies, such as Dada and Surrealism.¹¹

It is very confirming in some ways that this *Complete Concrete* project was realised shortly after the beginning of my own study, and a few years after our setting-up of HICA, though it is also clear that while HICA and this study consider an identification of a concrete art that is necessarily related to this rational concrete tradition, our approach, and the area we wish to consider differs greatly from what this project might have in mind. We have aimed at a more basic reconsidering of what the term 'concrete' means, which might then determine what kinds of artworks this may apply to, and reflecting more fundamentally on their related histories.

The HICA project developed from our own sense of this need; the attempt to address the confusion of interests we experienced around the London art scene in the late 1990s, and early 2000s. It primarily grew from discussions with other artists, such as, in this programme, Peter Suchin and Richard Couzins, as well as from our own practice. Here we observed an essential questioning of states of materiality, in which the term 'concrete' appeared a focus for discussion. Works that were clearly separate from this Constructive and Concrete tradition nonetheless seemed to indicate some resolution of the apparent confusion at the time through a reconnecting to what we understood as earlier material concerns of modernism. These concerns were also notably being made appeal to through forms such as Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, though Bourriaud's identification

6 Ibid., p.14

7 Ibid., pp.331-332

8 Ibid., p.334

9 Ibid., p.342, a comment included in the book's timeline notes.

10 Ibid., p.347, Max Bill, quoted in the timeline

11 Ibid. See timeline notes p.342

of a new era focussing on 'inter-human relations',¹² equally felt incomplete; an aspect of a broader inquiry into the complexities of the concrete, and, as identified as a mode of practice, somewhat restricting in its methods.¹³

Thus this study, rather than being something to specifically answer Haus Konstruktiv's noting of a lack here, aims to address the area of the concrete from the perspective of 'contemporary' art, as an essential concern of modern art, seeing some neglect of this aspect as possibly responsible for the sense of malaise around contemporary works that we observed and hoped to address. By this, it inquires into what a revised sense of materiality might be. And thus this text, reflecting on HICA's exhibition programme, primarily orientates between works significant in the origins of the Concrete and Constructivist tradition, such as van Doesburg's, and a structure of theories of 'contemporary' art through the Twentieth Century; in the main, a dynamic of ideas between Greenberg, Krauss, Foster, and Bourriaud.

1.22 A brief sketch of an accepted history of Concrete Art

I offer here then a sketch, to begin, of a usual understanding of Concrete Art's history:

As a later offshoot from the general development of Modern Art, and Constructivism in particular, Concrete Art can be judged to have roots in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Cézanne, an especially significant figure, seen by some as the 'Father of Modernism', represents 'the starting point for the emergence of Cubism',¹⁴ his works offering much of the rationale for the appearance of geometric forms in twentieth-century art, consistent with his comment, 'treat

¹² N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.28

¹³ Liam Gillick (writing in 2006) has noted in regard to *Relational Aesthetics*, for instance, that '...the text itself was a direct product of a specific and ongoing debate. *Relational Aesthetics* was the result of informal argument and disagreement among Bourriaud and some of the artists referred to in his text. Its content has been known to them for nearly a decade, and most of those involved, including Bourriaud, have developed new reactions to the text and revised their thinking since its publication.' L. Gillick, (2006) *Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"* [Online]

¹⁴ Museum Haus Konstruktiv, *Complete Concrete*, p.338

nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone.¹⁵ Charles Biederman puts these early stages of development succinctly, saying that artists,

...especially with the Impressionists... began to explore the creative potentialities of their medium, particularly in the realm of paint-colours. Then we saw van Gogh do likewise with the line potentialities of man's medium; Gauguin with the area and space factors; Cézanne with the three-dimensional problem. Finally the Cubists made the great change, and with colours, lines, forms and space began to release the Inventive factor ever more until the contents of art had become almost completely invented by man and not copied from nature.¹⁶

This exploration of the 'creative potentialities' of the medium, beginning a focus on the artworks themselves as objects, may thus be understood as a concretising tendency, enabling this 'invention', and a distancing from the representation of natural forms. Developing through Cubist and Futurist experimentation,¹⁷ these concerns become central for artists such as Malevich,¹⁸ and his Suprematism, or Kandinsky¹⁹ with his expressionist affinities.²⁰ These various artists are thus significant in preparing the ground for the non-representational tendencies of the 1920s and 1930s: diverse, and often conflicting standpoints, such as Russian and International Constructivism, De Stijl or elements within Dada and then Surrealism, through which discussion continues of the appropriate terminology, i.e. between 'non-representational', 'non-objective', 'abstract', or 'concrete'.²¹ The range and intensity of activity, spanning the expressionistic and the geometric, enables the formation of groups such as, in 1931, Abstraction-Création, 'which included the concrete and constructive as well as the abstract trends in a kind

¹⁵ G. Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution*, p.13

¹⁶ In S. Bann (ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.226

¹⁷ Gabo and Pevsner's *Realistic Manifesto*, in S. Bann (ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.7 reflects interestingly on this development.

¹⁸ His 'supremacy of pure sensation in the visual arts', noted in Museum Haus Konstruktiv, *Complete Concrete*, p.340

¹⁹ Ibid., p.339, notes Kandinsky's focus on 'the autonomy of painterly means' for instance.

²⁰ Symbolism's significant input here should also not be overlooked; a contribution that will form part of later discussion.

²¹ For instance, see Karl Gerstner's discussion in *Review of Seven Chapters of Constructive Pictures Etc.*, p.241

of international melting-pot',²² with several hundred members. Van Doesburg's Art Concret, of 1930, proved the culmination of his work's development²³ from pivotal involvements in De Stijl and International Constructivism, and while the term 'concrete' itself was still more widely employed and discussed, Concrete Art primarily becomes his strict and geometric identification; one still fairly peripheral addition to the breadth of general activity.²⁴

It is mainly due to Max Bill that Concrete Art is more widely known.²⁵ A member of Abstraction-Création, Bill was greatly influenced by van Doesburg's *Manifesto for Concrete Art*²⁶ and 'adopted the term in 1936'.²⁷ Around this time he also moved from Paris to Zurich where, with Richard Lohse, Camille Graeser and Verena Loewensberg he established the Allianz Group of Concrete artists.²⁸ This fortuitous move enabled the Allianz artists to maintain working, holding exhibitions and establishing a base for Concrete Art through the period of the Second World War,²⁹ which, after the war, was then readily extended into an international community of artists, including significant groupings through Latin America and Europe, and enabling Concrete Art to become a global movement.³⁰ Max Bill's comments on Concrete Art, of 1936 (revised in 1949) may be taken as a general statement of the intention of these works:

We call "Concrete Art" works of art which are created according to technique and laws which are entirely appropriate to them, without taking external support from experiential nature or from its transformation, that is to say, without the intervention of a process of abstraction.... Abstract

22 E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.14

23 he died in 1931

24 Margit Staber in *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, p.81

25 Ibid.

26 E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.61: 'Max Bill formulated in 1936 the principles of Concrete Art, conceived as an elaboration of the ideas that Theo van Doesburg expressed in 1930...'

27 Beate Reese in *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, p.274

28 Ibid., p.93; see Hella Nocke-Schrepper's discussion here.

29 Ibid., p.81; see Margit Staber's discussion again here.

30 Ibid., pp.276-281: Beate Reese, for instance, provides useful notes on the international proliferation of Concrete Art ideas in her essay *The Spread of Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*. Focussing on European developments from the 1940s-1970s, Reese also notes their dialogue particularly with America and South America.

ideas which previously existed only in the mind are made visible in a concrete form.³¹

The sense then from Bill of artworks as 'objects of mental use',³² focussed on realising geometric compositions through a 'mathematical way of thinking',³³ appears to closely align Concrete Art to the utopian aims of the period of High Modernism; perhaps forming part of the same 'rationalistic, deterministic' tradition that Krauss highlights, in discussion of Conceptual art, in which '...abstraction is necessarily the outcome of the triumphant progress of rationality',³⁴ with art as the '...pursuit of intelligibility by mathematical means'.³⁵ Bill makes various statements through his career, moving from the strictly mathematical to what he later describes as the 'logical method', in which 'every part of the creative process corresponds step by step to logical operations and their logical checking',³⁶ and becomes more accepting of differing approaches: he also states for instance that the mathematical is not the only route for Concrete Art,³⁷ and that Concrete Art's diversity is its strength,³⁸ and he did much, in terms of mounting exhibitions, to include more expressive and amorphous concrete tendencies; Tachisme or Art Informel.³⁹

A sense of awkward dialogue develops between this geometric Concrete Art and other art worlds. Karl Gerstner notes, the 'cold art' of Concrete and Constructivist

31 See the full statement and notes in E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.61

32 Ibid., p.27

33 Ibid.

34 See *Lewitt in Progress* in R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, pp 246-248

35 Ibid., Krauss quotes the critic Donald Kuspit, p.246

36 E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.27

37 M. Bill, *Statement 1974-77*, in E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.212

38 Hella Nocke-Schrepper in *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, pp.98-99

39 Bill, for instance, in the 1960 exhibition *Concrete Art: 50 years of development* exhibits Kandinsky's *First Abstract Watercolour*, 1910/1913 as the "premiere oeuvre concrete" (Museum Haus Konstruktiv, *Complete Concrete*, p.338), and extends 'Concrete Art to include examples of American Abstract Expressionism...' (H. Nocke-Schrepper, Op. Cit., p.99). Nocke-Schrepper adds an interesting note in regard to this Abstract Expressionist inclusion: 'Bill classifies the American Jackson Pollock's "drippings" as concrete. He attempts to relate this method to Concrete Art by virtue of its personal signature and generally valid structure. He may also have seen a relationship between the dripping technique and the Arpesque law of chance. This classification is problematical, however, with regard to the original definition'. (Ibid.)

tendencies as being ‘simply ignored’ in the ‘era of Informel painting’ for instance⁴⁰ and Dorothea Strauss suggests that ‘from the 1960s to the late nineties, Concrete-Constructivist Art increasingly retreated into the shadows of the art world – a process accompanied by a growing lack of mutual understanding’⁴¹

Around 1954 the Allianz group begins to split. Nocke-Schrepper suggests that ‘differences of opinion... can be read between the lines’,⁴² and discusses such probable causes as disagreement over Bill’s consideration of Informel and Tachist tendencies. Lohse no longer uses the term Concrete after 1960, and instead returns to terming his work “Constructive”, ‘clearly distancing himself from the psychological concrete tendency’.⁴³ A similar fault-line appears through other groups within this broad movement; with the development of Neo-Concretism and the divergence between the Ruptura and Frente groups, in Brazil, for example,⁴⁴ or Beate Reese’s noting of a gradual occurrence of a ‘breakdown into two groups – one rationally oriented, the other moderate and more open’⁴⁵ in the development of the New Tendencies groups in Europe.

While some continue within this ‘rational’ orthodoxy then, others develop closer dialogue with the wider activity of ‘contemporary art’; ideas of Concrete Art thus, through a further range of new groupings, are variously incorporated as part of the bases of new forms of practice, part of the rationale of experiments in media and technology,⁴⁶ and modes such as the interactive and participatory, Performance, Installation and Happenings.⁴⁷

Reese provides a useful sketch of the breadth of activity of the more strictly identifiable Concrete tendencies, through the 1950s and ‘60s, noting the extension

40 K. Gerstner, *Review of 5x10 Years of Graphic Design Etc.*, p.32

41 Museum Haus Konstruktiv, *Complete Concrete*, p.11

42 Hella Nocke-Schrepper in *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, pp.98

43 Ibid. p.99

44 Tate, *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, p.189 gives a brief account of this split.

45 Beate Reese in *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, p.278

46 Ibid., pp.240-241 suggests this in the development of Computer Art, or (p.243) in finding and exploring connections within various fields in science.

47 the development of Oiticica’s works within the Neo-Concretism of Brazil clearly illustrate this range of exploration, for example. See; Tate, *Hélio Oiticica – The Body of Colour*.

of Albers’ research into ‘the effects of colours and forms on the body, mind and visual perception’ by Vasarely, in the early 1950s, as part of the development of Kinetic Art, and a possible first manifestation of the particular fault-line discussed, in moving toward the adoption of the term Op Art in 1964.⁴⁸ This research ‘became the subject of systematic investigations by... “Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel” (abbr.:GRAV) founded in 1960 [by] Morellet, Vasarely and Vera Molnar, among others’,⁴⁹ operating from ‘a kind of study centre in Paris’,⁵⁰ focussing on the ‘two important impulses arising from Kinetic Art... the involvement of the viewer and the activation of the human sight process’.⁵¹ ‘Rationally oriented Concrete Art’ was now progressed by GRAV as well as the further groups Gruppo T and Gruppo N in Italy,⁵² Equipo 57 in Spain, and the umbrella association between artists from both Eastern and Western Europe, the Nove Tendencije (New Tendencies),⁵³ in a ‘phase in which Concrete Art was also expanding, concerning itself with investigations of vision and thus testing its association with scientific achievements and technical materials and methods’.⁵⁴

Additional to those pursuing a ‘rational’ and scientific Concrete Art, various others, such as the Argentine Gruppo Arte Concreto and BLOK in Poland, continued their work.⁵⁵ Zero, the loose association of artists based in Düsseldorf, who had taken part in earlier exhibitions of Kinetic Art were ‘less strict in their geometrisation and logical mathematical calculation’⁵⁶ and more concerned with ‘the effects of light... the animation of light objects and the spatial and light effects of various colours... further explored in so-called monochrome painting’.⁵⁷ While there are thus areas of mutual concern, this difference in approach again indicates this fault-line, which is then demonstrated in Zero’s exclusion from New Tendencies in 1963.⁵⁸

Other exponents of Concrete and Constructivist tendencies variously in dialogue

48 Beate Reese in *Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, p.277

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., p.278

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., In Milan and Padua

53 Ibid., p.279

54 Ibid., p.278

55 Ibid., p.279

56 Ibid., p.278

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p.279

internationally, through this period, are noted as the British Constructionists and American Hard-Edge painters, where the influence of Mondrian, and again of Albers seems significant,⁵⁹ if developed in a more Minimalist and less 'relational' direction.⁶⁰ Albers' particular wider influence 'on the post-war art of America', with those such as Eva Hesse, Kenneth Noland and Robert Rauschenberg amongst his students at Black Mountain College, Reese comments, is 'frequently postulated'.⁶¹

Noting a lack of new thinking and direction though within these identifiably Concrete tendencies, developing through the 1960s and '70s, an apparent academicism⁶² and "formalistic, unintellectual variety" (he quotes Rainer Jochims⁶³), Reese observes the movement's general decline. This apparent lack of new impetus is also seen to coincide with the first establishing of museum collections dedicated to Concrete Art, through the 1970s and '80s,⁶⁴ a shift which appears to indicate a 'final step': from this point 'it would seem appropriate to treat Concrete Art as a completed movement...'⁶⁵

A major concern of HICA's project was then the consideration from this seeming end-point, of how this tradition may still continue, and how ideas from this history, and its wider related concerns, may have been incorporated into general understandings of contemporary art.

1.23 Some current activity: possible positioning of artists shown by PS

We had been aware, for instance, of a network of artist-run spaces and projects maintaining work in this Concrete and Constructivist area. HICA was a means to make direct contact with some of these, such as PS, CCNOA (Centre for Contemporary Non-Objective Art) in Brussels, SNO (Sydney Non-Objective) in Sydney and MinusSpace in New York, to collaborate and discuss, as with PS,

59 Beate Reese in *Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, p.280

60 Ibid., pp.280-281

61 Ibid., p.280

62 Ibid., pp.281-282

63 Ibid., p. 282

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

and consider their activities and formulations of ideas. How, for instance, do they connect to this Concrete tradition? How do they negotiate their own concerns into the present?⁶⁶

The essay by Carolyn Barnes for SNO's catalogue of 2010⁶⁷ perhaps offers the most ready and pertinent statement from these groups. Theirs seems an effort to present a continuing development from the origins of non-objective works.⁶⁸ The work is identified as 'post-formalist' and 'counter-modern'. Distancing from the Neo-platonic, it states that SNO avoids 'realist' abstraction in its 'iconic end-mode'.⁶⁹

Barnes' essay also describes contemporary Australian artists' (such as John Nixon, who was instrumental in establishing SNO⁷⁰) move away from ironic uses of formalism in the mid-1990s, and their re-connecting with pioneering artists from earlier generations. Their current formulation, employing the term 'post-formalist' and rejecting irony, appears to implicitly acknowledge their artworks' having been subject to struggles with concerns of the High and Post-modern.

Our exhibitions with PS came from meeting with Jan van der Ploeg, PS' curator, in Spring 2009. PS were of great interest, as a very active space, having exhibited artists such as Olivier Mosset, Gerwald Rockenschaub, and Beat Zoderer. Following this very positive meeting, we jointly pursued the idea of an exchange of shows that might explore a shared 'concern for developing international dialogue while also facilitating local discussion'.⁷¹

HICA's show at PS (*HICA, as arranged*, 17 January – 28 February 2010) presented all contributors to our programme through this year; Peter Suchin, Richard Couzins,

66 Beyond the groups I mention, this wide network, predominantly stylistically connected as geometric and non-objective, includes artists occupying extremely diverse standpoints currently active within the same sphere, though utilising a generalised visual vocabulary, on the whole either Minimalist in its blank, everyday and manufactured nature, or mathematical, with interest in pattern and number still, in some form. Thus artists in this network also present very varying degrees of interest for our own programme.

67 Sydney Non Objective, *SNO Catalogue: 2005-2010*

68 Ibid., the catalogue does not give page numbers..

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 See *Concrete Now! Introducing PS* press release; Appendix A.

Alec Finlay, Alexander and Susan Maris, and David Bellingham, and additionally included a piece of my own work and a piece by Thomson and Craighead, who, by this time, we were also working with, towards their solo exhibition at HICA, held in June 2010. My focus here is on PS' exhibition at HICA, held in late summer 2009 (23 August – 27 September), as those mentioned above (except myself) will be considered later, individually, and it is thus PS' show which provides the new input to this discussion. This was one main intention in the exchange; to provide an important point of orientation within our programme for what might be perceived as our more usual relation to the 'contemporary' art-world, the world of our more frequent contributors.

At HICA, PS presented works by Julian Dashper, Michelle Grabner, Gerold Miller, John Nixon, Jan van der Ploeg, and Tilman; very well established artists in this area, based in Europe, America, Australia and New Zealand.

A statement by Michelle Grabner, included in the show's press release, gives some further indication of the current intentions of these artists: 'Painting is not Painting when it props up the self or attempts to tell stories. That activity is called picture making. Painting is larger than pictures but not larger than its limitations which are severe and singular and sweet.'⁷²

This comment appears happily consistent with a Greenbergian sense of autonomy, though I note in my text reflecting on the exhibition for HICA's website, that while the differing works' non-representation was straightforwardly presented, there also seemed an acceptance, and a working-with, of overlaid interpretation; a sense or feel of the work developing into more particular readings. I quoted from Petra Bungert's press release for the 2005 *Minimal Pop* exhibition at Florence Lynch Gallery in new York (that several of the artists taking part in this PS show took part in), for instance, in my text on the exhibition for HICA's website: "Their works are no longer driven by the social or metaphysical utopias of the pioneers of abstraction, but by codes and patterns, that have established themselves in the everyday world",⁷³ adding 'While the exploration continues of direct engagement, perhaps the emphasis has shifted. There seems an accepting of the inevitability of content, but a content that develops from the same inevitability as the 'codes and

⁷² See *Concrete Now! Introducing PS* press release; Appendix A.

⁷³ P. Bungert, *Minimal Pop / commissariat de Petra Bungert* [Online]

patterns': the natural consequence perhaps of the concrete structure of things.'⁷⁴

Michelle Grabner, *Untitled*, 2006
acrylic on canvas, 40cm diameter

A further statement by John Nixon, also included on the show's press release, leads perhaps to a clearer view of intentions: 'The materiality of my work is part of the materiality of experience. I work from the premise that the work of art exists in a "real", physical, rather than illusory world',⁷⁵ a statement placing Nixon in dialogue with the original Constructivist intentions of, for instance, Alexei Gan, who calls for works to be 'materialistically intelligible'.⁷⁶ This dialogue is in-keeping with SNO's stress of the sense of history informing their activities; they are not just concerned with the 'current',⁷⁷ and suggests these overlaid interpretations as part of the process of intelligibility of the work; they are not counted as a threat to the work's material status.

⁷⁴ *Concrete Now! Introducing PS* webpage, HICA website, h-i-c-a.org [Online]

⁷⁵ See *Concrete Now! Introducing PS* press release; Appendix A.

⁷⁶ In S. Bann (ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.38

⁷⁷ See C. Barnes in *Sydney Non Objective, SNO Catalogue: 2005-2010* (the catalogue does not give page numbers)

John Nixon, *Untitled*, 2008
Oil on hessian over canvas, 20x25cm

Here there seems a required shift of viewpoint, equivalent to that noted by Krauss in regard to interpretations of Sol LeWitt's work, away from rational and transcendent meanings, and toward the worldly.⁷⁸ Krauss concludes an opposite 'absurd Nominalism' with LeWitt,⁷⁹ where these artists seem to conclude something equally different, but perhaps more positively engaged. Discussion of what this point may be and how it may be reached remains as a background sense for much of this remaining text.

Jan van der Ploeg, *Untitled*, 2008
Paper ready-made, endless edition, 23 x 30cm

⁷⁸ See *LeWitt in Progress*, in R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, pp.245-256

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.256

This then also suggests these works are at some remove from the tradition considered by Haus Konstruktiv. While the works certainly engaged discussion of universal meanings,⁸⁰ there seem alternative explanations for the simple geometries still variously employed; in no way Pythagorean and Euclidean, but still a basic visual language.⁸¹

1.3 HICA Exhibition: Peter Suchin: *The Grey Planets*, 26 October – 30 November 2008

1.31 The origins of a modern approach to painting: Suchin's relation to the 'concrete'

In his commentary on his exhibition, included in HICA's first publication, Suchin suggests that his works are entirely material things; they do not make any appeal beyond their material form.⁸² They may be comparable then to the intentions expressed by Nixon, in beginning discussion and exploration of how these different kinds of works may be placed and understood.

Suchin's work, as a painter, and in the context here of other painterly approaches, of Grabner and Nixon, also very appropriately at the beginning of this discussion, connects to the identification of basic characteristics of modernist artworks, through developments frequently taken to begin with Manet: the emphasising of the paint and brushstrokes, and the flattening of perspective,⁸³ both of which

⁸⁰ My comments on van der Ploeg's work in the exhibition, for instance; 'A notice indicating the cut-price value of goods in shops, it is a cartoon explosion of orange and yellow. The form is loud, its exaggerated jagged outline reinforcing the shout of the colours. This form, especially in isolation, can be considered for what it embodies. The question in much writing on the Concrete is whether there can be a universal response, something that might ultimately lead to the making of works with objective certainty. The piece succinctly opens this discussion – would not all viewers respond similarly to these attention-grabbing forms and colours?' From *Concrete Now! Introducing PS* webpage, HICA website, h-i-c-a.org [Online]

⁸¹ As is noted is employed in the work of the Russian Constructivists, for instance: See Tate, *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, p.99

⁸² HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.12

⁸³ for example see J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.35

serve to focus attention on the materiality of the artwork.⁸⁴ That is, paint is explored directly to engage meaning, rather than looking through it, as medium, to something it may be manipulated to depict. A sense of the artwork's being part of the same world as the artist and viewer is promoted, rather than the illusion of its being a window to some other world.⁸⁵

Greenberg states, 'Manet meanwhile, closer to Courbet, was attacking subject matter on its own terrain by including it in his pictures and exterminating it then and there... Like the Impressionists he saw the problems of painting as first and foremost problems of the medium, and he called the spectators' attention to this.'⁸⁶

Manet's technique produces some marks with 'no real representational purpose',⁸⁷ the presence of which appears the materialization of a modern ambivalence, 'the senseless, insignificant life of which one is a casual witness, without adding remarks or explanations, neither passing judgment nor taking sides'.⁸⁸

Suchin's paintings, appearing somewhat haphazard accumulations of acrylic paint, (though they are in fact developed over extended periods of time, and are carefully considered) have clearly found a way to similarly maintain themselves without the need for any representational elements, his ambivalence extending to the rejection of 'ideas of the "spiritual" and also of "expression"',⁸⁹ stating that his works do not attempt to uncover any kind of "essence" either.⁹⁰ How does this stance then reflect on the possible meanings of his paintings?

As an, especially British, manifestation of apparently spontaneous, but in

84 Ibid, p.28: Greenberg suggests that the development of the avant-garde is '...best traced in painting, which as the chief victim of literature brought the problem into sharpest focus'.

85 Bill Hare quotes the Italian Renaissance theorist Alberti's describing of painting as a 'window on to the world', as part of its illusionistic role, 'aping reality'. See National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.84. The degree to which this comment suggests the seeing *through* of painting is perhaps open to debate. The art critic Pierre Schneider's comment, that perspective painting 'was like a window opening on an imaginary world', appears the commonly understood implication. Pierre Schneider in *The Challenge: A Tribute to Modern Art* (1974), 6.50mins.

86 J. O'Brian (Ed.), op. cit. p.29

87 K. Martin (Ed.), *Edouard Manet: Water-Colours and Pastels*, p.7

88 Ibid., pp.18-19

89 HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.12

90 Ibid.

actuality, slowly developed compositions, chaotic and colourful, they might bear some comparison with, as an example, Howard Hodgkin's works. But Suchin's are not intended as 'translations from the original experience of an occasion, a moment, a meeting or a group of people, through another set of experiences involving the activity of painting'⁹¹ as Hodgkin's are. Here, Hodgkin's procedures seem consistent with 'the claim that abstract art constructs a visual/auditory/verbal "equivalent" for experience...' that Krauss has noted.⁹² On the contrary, Suchin states 'there is no attempt to capture or record a specific mood or sense of something already "out there" in the world.'⁹³ His intention, it would seem by this, is to be more purposefully aware of how his works do not make any external appeals, but simply, and wholly, manifest meaning in themselves.

Here the significance of what works are *not* may be reflected on: i.e. the difference between Suchin's and Hodgkin's titles reflect the nature, and something of the values, of their intentions (Compare *An Endless Loop of Death* (Suchin), to *Mr and Mrs James Kirkman* (Hodgkin) for example) and it seems quite apparent that an equivalent difference also exists between their use of colour, line, texture, composition; their whole manner and approach.

Peter Suchin
An Endless Loop of Death, 2003

Howard Hodgkin
Mr and Mrs James Kirkman, 1980-84

91 S. Nairne, *State of the Art*, p.118

92 R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.236

93 HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.12

Titles of Suchin's works are attached through a balance of randomness and suitability:⁹⁴ a phrase will occur, will crop up, which is tested against the work to see if it fits; it may not, and be discarded, or it may be a temporary addition, later superseded, or it may stick.

1.32 A dialogue with materials and form

This acceptance of random elements highlights the significant early influence of Kurt Schwitters on Suchin's work,⁹⁵ a connection of sensibility that proposes a genealogy via Dada, back to the ambivalent attitude of Manet. In *What is Dada?* Theo van Doesburg, who was a close friend and collaborator of Schwitters, wrote, 'Dada is the most direct expression of our time as an amorphous era and wishes to be exactly this.' ... 'Dada does not give motives to its acts to serve an "end"... It is not in need of proof or justification... Dada in itself is the creative act' ... 'Dada is a face... Dada wants to be lived.'⁹⁶

The plot-holders' scenario I included in my Introduction may be related here. Suchin appears to judge that any marks made always state or reveal a position, without the need for imagery being produced. Similarly, Bourriaud accepts this state as a precondition of a work of art, suggesting, for instance, regarding a sense of concretization here that;

...every canvas produced by Jackson Pollock so closely links the flow of paint to an artist's behaviour that the latter seems to be the image of the former, like its "necessary product", as Hubert Damisch has written. At the beginning of art we find the behaviour adopted by the artist, that set of moods and acts whereby the work acquires its relevance in the present.⁹⁷

In this way, Suchin's paintings' intentions seem largely consistent with Greenberg's

94 I have been present during the titling process, as Suchin notes: HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.10

95 Ibid., p.9

96 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.131-133

97 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.41

sense of art as 'cause', rather than as Kitsch 'effect',⁹⁸ or Foster's sense of 'ideological acts'.⁹⁹

Despite Suchin's caution in considering this procedure a 'dialogue' between himself and 'the painted surface'¹⁰⁰ (perhaps aware of how quickly a suggestion of such a thing may be taken as an 'end', the focus of some effect rather than cause again, some expressionistic or psychological drama produced at the expense of the work), this appears an accurate observation, which may present a further moment of comparison between his approach and Manet's; Manet's technique requires him to be not fully in control of his materials and the meanings they produce; to be at some critical distance; a judge as to whether the combined results say something he feels 'works'. T. J. Clark, for instance, notes, regarding Manet's *Olympia*, what he suggests may be taken as its 'modern' basis: 'The painter seems to have put his stress deliberately on the physical substance of his materials, and the way they only half obey his efforts to make them stand for things in the world',¹⁰¹ though Clark also questions this material engagement and the resulting sense of 'flatness' of the image.¹⁰² He discusses various aspects of the painting, such as the figure's pose and expression '... an outward gaze: a pair of jet-black pupils, a slight asymmetry of the lids, a mouth with a curiously smudged and broken corner, features half adhering to the plain oval of the face...'¹⁰³ to consider her look as,

...blatant and particular, but... also unreadable, perhaps deliberately so. It is candid but guarded, poised between address and resistance – so precisely, so deliberately, that it comes to be read as a production of the depicted person herself; there is an inevitable conflation of the qualities of precision and contrivance in the way the image is painted and those qualities as belonging to the fictive subject; it is her look, her action upon us, her composition of herself.¹⁰⁴

98 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.16

99 H. Foster, *Between Modernism and the Media*, in *Recodings*, p.56

100 HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.12

101 T. J. Clark, *Olympia's Choice*, in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, p.138

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., p.133

104 Ibid.

These, for Clark, register something else through the material negotiation of the painting, they ‘...insist on something more complex than a physical state, or at any rate the state of a medium.’¹⁰⁵ In this discussion of Suchin’s paintings, and in the light of references to Dada as also ‘a face’, as a ‘creative act’, Clark’s comments further bring to mind a remark by Serge Daney, that Bourriaud quotes: “all form is a face looking at us”.¹⁰⁶

1.33 Can this dialogue operate without representational elements?

Given this sense of dialogue then, in terms of both material and meaning, can light be shed on its mechanisms, that is, at the scales of both local acts, within the actual processes of generating meaning in such a way, and the more ideological?

Peter Suchin, *In Castorp’s Castle*, 2001

While the accumulated marks highlight the nature of the works as painted surface, and as objects, Suchin appears also aware of a sense of perceived depth. (This appears in accord with his acceptance, which he notes in connection to his development of titles of works, of a ‘language instinct’, referencing the book

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.138

¹⁰⁶ N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.21

of this title by Steven Pinker.¹⁰⁷) Seemingly consistent with this, Suchin seems to accept a necessary representational instinct, an inevitable visual or psychological ‘reading-in’ to even the most basic graphic mark; a horizontal line may be read as a horizon, for example, and, as he notes, some of his paintings may then be judged to have ‘connotations of landscape’, even if, as he perhaps wishfully adds, this is not actually the case.¹⁰⁸ (As noted earlier with Nixon and Grabner, there is acceptance of these overlaid readings, but here this appears more present as part of Suchin’s painterly procedure, part of his manipulation of materials, to a much greater extent than in theirs.)

There is then both a residual, innate meaning, of marks and materials, and, developed from these, the constant possibility of other external meanings. Representation may be a side-effect of material engagement, and not its intention, but it remains a surrounding presence, able to encroach at any moment.

Awareness of this becomes central to a shift from Greenberg’s medium specificity to Krauss’ consideration of Structuralist and Poststructuralist interpretation: the former’s desire to maintain the purely material,¹⁰⁹ seemingly outmoded by the latter’s perceiving of the impossibility of this state.¹¹⁰

The brief glimpses afforded of the material and object natures of paintings, perhaps necessarily give way to differing interpretations; always potentially opening windows onto other kinds of worlds: perceptually, as with this example of landscape, or conceptually, such as the expressionistic and spiritual which Suchin also rejects. Thus the purely material state he on the one hand desires, may seem necessarily, immediately and perhaps irretrievably compromised.

¹⁰⁷ HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.10

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.11

¹⁰⁹ See, for instance, J. O’Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.32: ‘Purity in art consists in the acceptance... of the limitations of the medium of the specific art’.

¹¹⁰ ‘...within the situation of postmodernism, practice is not defined in relation to a given medium... but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms...’ R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.288

1.4 HICA Exhibition: Richard Couzins: *Free Speech Bubble* 1 March – 5 April 2009

1.41 Questioning the location of meaning

Manet appears preoccupied with the status of the picture-plane; he repeatedly utilises devices such as mirrors and windows as means to juxtapose two planes, '... two realities, separate and connected, interior and exterior, near and far, motionless and moving...' ¹¹¹ the *Bar aux Folies-Bergère* or a sketch such as *View from a Café on the Place du Théâtre Français*, for instance, directly consider the mechanisms by which the painting's materials, rather than being mute and passive vehicles of a scene, may play host to something more active.

Edouard Manet

View from a Café on the Place du Théâtre Français, 1881

Richard Couzins' production of obtusely arbitrary symbols from unlikely everyday background textures appears a contemporary consideration of processes related to one line of development from Manet's works, in Symbolism, ¹¹² a development which leads to a, contrary seeming, identification of materiality.

¹¹¹ K. Martin (Ed.), *Edouard Manet: Water-Colours and Pastels*, p.20

¹¹² Bowness sees Cézanne and Mallarmé as those who directly pick up the baton from Manet, for instance. A. Bowness, *Modern European Art*, p.18

Routes through Impressionism to a sense of material engagement are part of the conventionally understood development towards a 'concrete' art. Biederman, for example notes;

From Impressionism on there were indications that not only the content was changing but that there was also an attempt to change the medium... We can today see more clearly what a momentous event Impressionism was. It was the Impressionists in particular who decisively began the transition away from dependence upon the forms and colours of nature, who began also the investigation of nature's structure. ¹¹³

And, progressing toward Constructivism, or Biederman's own formulation of Constructionism; 'At last that which Monet and his friends had initiated was completed. The "oblong of pink", the "square of blue," the "streak of yellow", had been fully realized. Man was now truly a "creative" artist!' ¹¹⁴ In this context and discussion though, it is also interesting to note the direction of development these innovations indicate for an artist such as Kandinsky, who says on seeing Monet's *Haystacks*, 'I had the impression that here painting itself comes to the foreground; I wondered if it would not be possible to go further in this direction.' ¹¹⁵ This leads him to 'express the inner feeling rather than the outer reality', ¹¹⁶ developing away from initial Impressionist influences, and allying his approach instead with the 'symbolist tradition'. ¹¹⁷ (A move also seen elsewhere, for example with Van Gogh and Gauguin, who aim to rescue painting from the materialism they judge Impressionism to be promoting. ¹¹⁸) Here Kandinsky's aim of 'a common language of colour and line... without recourse to natural form or representation' ¹¹⁹ is not employed to express any conscious affinity, but an 'inner sympathy of meaning'. ¹²⁰ It is of interest here that Greenberg, while noting Kandinsky's own designating of his works as 'concrete', ¹²¹ also discerns a limitation to Kandinsky's understanding

¹¹³ S. Bann (ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, pp.231-232

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p.v

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.xiv

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.xv

¹¹⁸ J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.202

¹¹⁹ W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p.xx

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.xv

¹²¹ J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.4

of modern art; Kandinsky's, he suggests, is not a genuine adherence to 'flatness' and continues to allude to depth; something seeming significantly related to this developed Symbolist methodology.¹²²

1.42 Sign and signified; 'outer' and 'inner'?

Richard Couzins, stills from *Free Speech Bubble*, 2009

Couzins' *Free Speech Bubble* attaches significance to various shapes and colours, stretching from reasonable association, to the absurd. He exposes aspects of objects that are familiar from our day-to-day negotiation of the world, but for which we may have no words, no definitions. What, and how, do these signs signify? As part of a language system, or in a more immediate way, through some inherent quality of shape and colour?¹²³ Divisions are blurred by combining these signs

¹²² Ibid., p.3; p.5

¹²³ Margaret Iverson, in her text *Saussure versus Pierce: Models for a Semiotics of Visual Art*, (A. Rees, & F. Borzello, (Eds.) *The New Art History*, pp.83-94) provides a useful outline of Saussure's and Pierce's conceptions of semiotics (Saussure's linguistic concern, focussing on the arbitrary and conventional, is compared to Pierce's 'richer' system, which allows for signs to be 'motivated'; to be more than just arbitrary; pp.85-86). In considering whether a semiotics of visual art is possible, she looks at those, such as Shapiro, who have sought to develop a, in his case, Saussurean approach (pp.88-89), and later artists (Jasper Johns, Mary Kelly) who, Iverson reflects, develop approaches more productively related to Pierce. Pierce determines the categories of 'symbol', 'index' and 'icon', in his account, enabling the further sub-division of 'icons' into 'images' and 'diagrams'. 'Diagrams', highlight the values presented by the relation of the parts of the object, and are thus, Iverson notes, 'particularly helpful in a semiological

with other sensory information; touch and texture, music and sound (Kandinsky's comment on 'breaking down the barrier between music and painting' seems apt to state here; 'the effect of music is too subtle for words'¹²⁴). The 'feeling' of the work develops through its constituents; cheap carpet, bars of soap, chewing gum, the artist's bare feet: unlikely elements, collaged to articulate an overall sense.

Richard Couzins, *Free Speech Bubble*
wall poster, 2009

Krauss' discussion in *In The Name of Picasso* relates interestingly to the various considerations here. Questioning 'classical theories of mimesis' as limiting meaning to reference ('A visual representation of something "means" that thing in

critique' (p.91). This then, for Iverson, presents a shift from a Structuralist drawing out of binary oppositions structuring meaning (such as with Shapiro), to a Post-structuralist deconstruction of those same oppositional categories; artists such as Johns' and Kelly's 'non-use' of the 'image' to enable the exploration of the 'ideological implications' of any 'sign' (p.93)

¹²⁴ W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p.xix

the world of which it is a picture' for instance¹²⁵), she considers ways that meaning may be opened up to varying interpretation, elements in Picasso's collage works being the particular examples. She argues against original meanings in terms of biographical interpretation, with, for instance, 'art-history as a history of the proper name',¹²⁶ and cites Linda Nochlin as someone offering this kind of interpretation to reveal sole, fixed meanings,¹²⁷ seeking particular statements rather than an open play of meaning. Krauss also develops a discussion of semiotics from this observation, to judge Picasso's collage works, as his '...meditation on the inner workings of the sign...',¹²⁸ where this 'play' may also be taken as his reflection on the nature of the picture-plane; 'what collage achieves, then, is a metalanguage of the visual. It can talk about space without employing it; it can figure the figure through the constant superimposition of grounds; it can speak in turn of light and shade through the subterfuge of written text.'¹²⁹ For Krauss, this state moves against modernism's desire for such things as 'flatness', to move toward something, in comparison, seeming distinctly postmodern; '...collage operates in direct opposition to modernism's search for perceptual plenitude and unimpeachable self-presence' ... 'Collage problematizes that goal by setting up discourse in place of presence, a discourse founded on a buried origin...'¹³⁰

1.43 Developing Symbolist strategies

Significantly here then the symbolism that is the Symbolist movement's basic principle is not that of allegorical paintings, but a more ambiguous sense of the artworks' alluding to some other world of meaning. Rather than the symbolism of a skull representing death, or a snake, evil, and so on,¹³¹ imagery was engaged as 'part of a deeper language of fear, aspiration and desire that expressed the obscure instincts and neuroses of the human psyche'¹³²— a language of

125 R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.27

126 Ibid., p.25

127 Ibid., pp.30-31

128 R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.37

129 Ibid., p.38

130 Ibid.

131 Andrew Wilton in Tate, *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*, p.11

132 Ibid., p.12

the "unconscious".¹³³ Narrative considerations, such as moral significance, or didactic intention¹³⁴ give way to 'qualities of mood and poetic sentiment'.¹³⁵ At least initially then, the Symbolists may be judged to be attempting to '...express the transcendental glimpsed through a dream-like mist...'¹³⁶ MaryAnne Stevens states this as the erecting of,

a metaphysical system indebted to the German philosopher, Schopenhauer, which held that objects in the external world were apprehended by the senses alone, and were thus merely relative, the indicators or signs of the absolute, unchanging concept, the Idea. Since the Idea possessed no finite form, it was intimated through objects in the external world which established a relationship with the Idea through "correspondence"¹³⁷

Gustave Moreau

Oedipe Voyageur (L'Egalité devant la mort), c.1888

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid., p.36, part of Christopher Newall's discussion in, *Themes of Love and Death in Aesthetic Painting of the 1860s*

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid., p.33, comment by Andrew Wilton

137 Ibid., p.53; MaryAnne Stevens, *Symbolism – A French Monopoly?*

This relation appears consistent with the reasoning enabling Kandinsky's perceiving of his works' expression of 'the inner feeling rather than the outer reality', a relation, between the materials and imagery of painting and its meaning, a new way of looking through the paint, which suggests an emphasis on the 'medium', with all of its spiritualist connotations: '...to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority. Description is banished that beautiful things may be evoked, magically; the regular beat of verse is broken in order that words may fly upon subtler wings.'¹³⁸

Elihu Vedder, *Memory*, 1870

Thus a kind of magic trick may be in operation, only possible perhaps in a collapsing sense of perspective, exploiting the potential for juxtaposition, and the beginnings of 'flatness' that this enables. Rather than present the illusion of a view on to the world, paintings now act to manifest an inner world, perceived by the viewer of an image.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.60, Stevens quotes Arthur Symons, writing in 1900.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.51. Notably there is subjective and 'individualistic apprehension of the Idea'. For instance; 'Mallarmé's emphasis upon the process of suggestion implied a new relationship between writer and reader, where the latter was invited to enter into collusion with the former in order to complete the work of art'.

Couzins' absurd delivery is as a very substandard magician; the cheapness of his props, the under-rehearsed and improvised nature of his performance, the general lack of awe at the results, all serve to undermine this relation and the rationale behind it. If you do not believe in magic, but believe instead that every apparent illusion has some actual and physical explanation, then the sleight-of-hand may instead become the focus of attention, the resulting deception an entertaining diversion rather than a proof of the supernatural. Couzins' works debunk esoteric meanings, but find the means to pose the question; if not the product of some otherworldly presence, by some dark art, magically summoned... if significance still remains, unavoidably generated, seemingly to the point of absurdity by the world we inhabit, is this significance not a necessary aspect of our constant and everyday surroundings?

This realization appears worked through by the Symbolists, as their materials become a focus in themselves. Andrew Wilton suggests, by about 1905, 'Symbolist thinking was increasingly to be seen on the surface of pictures...' that sought 'to embody directly the emotional life of the artist'.¹⁴⁰ Krauss, in her essay *Grids*, is again illuminating here, especially around the sense of a flattening of the picture-plane. She comments, 'I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that behind every twentieth century grid their lies – like a trauma that must be repressed – a Symbolist window parading in the guise of a treatise on optics.'¹⁴¹ She proposes that these grids (and windows) are thus 'fully, even cheerfully, schizophrenic',¹⁴² in that they allow traffic between the metaphysical intentions of the Symbolists¹⁴³ and the 'determined materialism'¹⁴⁴ of the Twentieth Century. She notes though that this schizophrenic tendency begins with the Symbolists themselves, '... in the hands of the Symbolist painters and poets, this image is turned in an explicitly modernist direction. For the window is experienced as simultaneously transparent and opaque.'¹⁴⁵... 'But if glass transmits, it also reflects. And so the window is experienced by the Symbolist as a mirror as well – something that freezes and locks the self into the space of its own reduplicated being.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.33

¹⁴¹ R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.17

¹⁴² Ibid., p.18

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.16

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.10

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.16

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.16-17

Odilon Redon, *The Day*, 1891

This dual direction sees the beginnings then of the medium itself, and its treatment, becoming the message; 'techniques began to be governed by gesture, by instinctive responses...' ¹⁴⁷ and the direct 'Symbolism' observed in the paint itself is noted, as with Maurice Denis' famous quote, "... a picture, before it becomes a war-horse or a nude female figure, or some other anecdote, is first and foremost a surface covered with paint in a specific pattern"; ¹⁴⁸ the very particularity of this, its significance.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler
Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea, 1871

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Wilton in Tate, *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*, p.33

¹⁴⁸ As quoted by Karl Gerstner in *Review of Seven Chapters of Constructive Pictures Etc.*, p.240

Whistler's paintings, for instance, appear in accord with Walter Pater's dictum that, 'music is "the art toward which all the others aspire"' ¹⁴⁹ in their materiality; their colours and, pointedly, composition:

Whistler summed up another argument about the parallelism of art forms. His own pictures were often designated as pieces of music – Symphonies, Nocturnes etc. – and the intention to suggest the non-verbal ambiguity of music is of greatest significance, opening up the possibility of abstract art, which indeed as it evolved in the early twentieth century was in some important respects the logical development of Symbolism. ¹⁵⁰

Similarly with Mallarmé, in his yielding 'initiative to the words', ¹⁵¹ focussing on materials perhaps more so than any Symbolist painter, ultimately considering the words on the page itself, in his supremely influential poem *Un Coup de Dés*, their particular position and placing, above any literal sense they make, as necessary in terms of meaning: 'What is most innovative about the poem, from a formal point of view, is the way in which the conception has been materialized – in a manner that makes the physical layout, the spacing, and the typography not merely a representation of the poem but an integral aspect of the poem itself.' ¹⁵² In this way it can be observed that "n'abolira" in thirty-point bold capitals, sits like a rock at the bottom' of the page, for example, ¹⁵³ its physical presentation engaging Mallarmé's metaphor in the poem, of '...the shipwreck on the shoals of meaninglessness or contingency', and posing the question of how 'the ideational and the plastic aspects of the work are integrated'. ¹⁵⁴ In his commentary on the poem Henry Weinfeld asks, 'is it possible to abstract that conception from the welter of phenomena presented by the poem?', ¹⁵⁵ and this questioning itself seems an extension of Mallarmé's general poetic intentions:

...the duality of our being is concretized in poetry in a more immediate way than is possible in music. In the Mallarméan universe one might say

¹⁴⁹ H. Weinfeld, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems*, p.xiv

¹⁵⁰ Tate, *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*, p.186

¹⁵¹ As quoted in G. Lelong, *Daniel Buren*, p.27

¹⁵² H. Weinfeld, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems*, p.265

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.269

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.266

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

that the “prosaic” world gazes darkly at the “poetic” one, as through a window (and the reverse is also true), so that the actual poetic emotion is engendered not by the vision of the ideal taken in itself but by this tragic duality...The abundance of images in his verse that are at once symbols of reflection and of a passage to another life – windows, mirrors, ice, glass, and water – affirms the extent to which the Mallarméan vision is grounded in a series of irreconcilable polarities – self and other, the prosaic and the poetic, the temporal and the eternal.¹⁵⁶

Stéphane Mallarmé, extract from *Un Coup de Dés*, 1897

Un Coup de Dés reflects then on a state of being caught between the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’: the poem’s sense is at least in part reliant on the materialization of words on the page, as a painting is reliant on the materialization of colours on a canvas. It poetically considers content as bound to the form itself, and the implications of this move toward exteriority.

156 Ibid., p.xiv

Here then, in these few examples, seem the origins of materials being glimpsed without their usual associated content, in, as it were, their objecthood,¹⁵⁷ describing a route from Manet’s investigations of perspective’s unstable state, to deliberate explorations by some of images and poems as, first and foremost, objects of this world.

1.44 Paintings as objects?

The development of non-representation in painting appears then as means to re-focus attention, subverting any literal content and yielding initiative to the materials. If the work is found to still have some meaning, perhaps less familiar kinds of meaning, something intrinsic to the materials and processes of making, then, it seems, the logical implication is that this is not ‘inner’, but ‘outer’, something developed between the work and the world.

Serge Fauchereau, stating Kupka’s achieving of ‘radically abstract’ paintings in 1911,¹⁵⁸ notes that with Cubism ‘the painting was no longer a window onto the real world, but a world in its own right, an object’,¹⁵⁹ part of the same reality as the viewer. A much more immediate relation of sign to signified is implied: the sign in some way embodies its meaning.

François Kupka
Fugue à deux couleurs et pour Amorpha, chromatique chaude, 1911

157 Discussion of Michael Fried’s designations of art and objecthood will feature later in this text. Here, this beginning to seeing artworks as objects is a crucial step in developing what, for Fried, comes to actually represent the art in the relation, separate from the objecthood of ordinary objects in everyday life.

158 Tate, *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, p.159

159 Ibid., p.160

Here though we may reflect on the progress of modern approaches since this Cubist achievement: it may be noted that in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky, crucially involved as he was in developments from Symbolist procedures towards ideas of a concrete art (both in his own practice and in his significant influence, especially on van Doesburg¹⁶⁰), and in the same year as Kupka is credited with producing a painting-as-object (1911), insists on an Ideal plane of meaning in addition to the flat material surface of the picture-plane.¹⁶¹

Richard Couzins' works, as an example of current practice apparently equating meaning with some order of symbolic process, may indicate that it has been this latter assertion of Kandinsky's that has proven most durable; perhaps this is a step back from this Cubist achievement, finding a new way to instead re-state Mallarmé's position of being caught between the 'inner' and 'outer'; a new instance of its possibly tragic duality.

Richard Couzins

Installation view *Free Speech Bubble*, 2009

That is, Couzins' Free Speech Bubble installation may generally appear in accord with a move toward exteriority: its dispersed and indeterminate presentation, a central motif of a nonsense card game (paralleling in some ways Mallarmé's throw

160 See, for instance, J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.16-19

161 W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p.44

of dice), and with works scattered like Mallarmé's words, between a projection in the gallery and a video piece bluntly engaging HICA's surroundings, posters placed on the outside of the HICA building and in and around Inverness, half-an-hour's drive away, does suggest its engaging of actual space as key to its being an active exploration, both in its making and in its experiencing.

Richard Couzins

Installation view *Free Speech Bubble*, 2009

In this it may align with John Cage's comments on peoples' expectations of the meaning of music as an 'inner' experience, rather than something they understand as 'outer', as just sound. Cage states his conception of music as something that is 'not inner, but is just outer', as sound.¹⁶² This shift, engaging the external and actual, appears to correspond to Couzins' sense: there equally seems no 'silence' in his work ('there is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time',¹⁶³ 'there is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound.'¹⁶⁴). There is instead an inescapable music of real-world significance that we are constantly immersed within.

162 jdavidm, (2007) *John Cage about silence* [Online] 2.20mins

163 J. Cage, *Silence*, p.8

164 Ibid., p.191

But it may also seem odd that these artists and poets that I consider here, in aiming to explore developments between Symbolist innovators and current explorations, such as Couzins', are required to make such major efforts to engage this 'outer' meaning. It should perhaps be our basic experience of the world and of things which are objects.

Couzins' works appear to reflect that despite our unavoidable immersion in this 'outer' sense, perhaps we can only make sense of it through translation to some 'inner' awareness: perhaps a view not through some conceptual 'window' or other is an impossible thing to achieve, not just in some temporary and isolated consideration before an artwork, but in our total and everyday involvement with the 'real'.

Here representation seems inevitably present, equivalent to Krauss' observation on the use of grids in Modernist painting, where she argues the ubiquity of this form undermines Modernist claims to originality. In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, she says:

The canvas surface and the grid that scores it do not fuse into that absolute unity necessary to the notion of an origin. For the grid follows the canvas surface, doubles it. It is a representation of the surface, mapped, it is true, onto the same surface it represents, but even so, the grid remains a figure, picturing various aspects of the "originating" object: through its mesh it creates an image of the woven infrastructure of the canvas; through its network of coordinates it organizes a metaphor for the plane geometry of the field; through its repetition it configures the spread of lateral continuity. The grid thus does not reveal the surface, laying it bare at last; rather it veils it through a repetition.¹⁶⁵

... All these are the texts which the "original" ground plane of a Mondrian, for example, repeats – and, by repeating, represents. Thus the very ground that the grid is thought to reveal is already riven from within by a process of repetition and representation; it is always already divided and multiple.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.161

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

1.5 HICA Exhibition: Alec Finlay and Alexander and Susan Maris: *You'll have had your tea?* 3 May – 7 June 2009

1.51 Innovations through text and collage

The works that Alec Finlay and Alexander and Susan Maris included in their exhibition were, in their wide variety of forms, individually more focussed affairs than Suchin's and Couzins'. Each artwork, at least as part of its conception, had more apparent 'ends'. These might be subsumed into larger and more open poetic methodologies, but there still remained clearer statements to be negotiated, either as part of what Finlay claims as the 'continued unfurling of the traditions of haiku and renga'¹⁶⁷ and their related poem-objects, or as the quasi-scientific research that the Marises presented. Finlay exhibited;

outlines of islands and lakes realised as biscuit cutter patterns, baked as biscuits; mesostic poems composed on the names of fruits used to make jam and jelly; ...a piece, bread, baked with an imprinted poem' ... '16 tea-prints... gently stochastic spills of different tea brews... each imprinted with a cup mark or 'moon' and their own unique handwritten mesostic.¹⁶⁸

Alec Finlay (mesostic name poems) with Caroline Smith (jams & jelly)
mesostic jam & jelly, 2008-2009

¹⁶⁷ See the exhibition press release; Appendix A.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Alec Finlay, *tea-moon*,

tea-moon spill print with mesostic name poem, 2007-2009

The Marises' objects connected with their theory 'that the gelatine 'offering' made by Joseph Beuys to Rannoch Moor in 1970, has metabolically transformed the Moor'.¹⁶⁹ They had collected '900 ml of water from each of the 21 named rivers on Rannoch Moor and using heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) gathered from the surrounding moor... prepared and consumed a series of 21 kettles of heather tea.' The presented kettles have 'been used just once and... engraved with the name of the corresponding river'.¹⁷⁰

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid.

Alexander and Susan Maris

Kettle from ***Heather Tea on Rannoch Moor***, 2005 (ongoing)

Textual elements were directly present or lurked in the margins of all these works, occupying a range of states: from conceptual statements to hand-written and visual poems. The presentation of words across this range appeared significant: the forms chosen were appropriate to the intended meaning, to the extent that text was, at times, treated as a pictorial element; as form, as colour.

Alec Finlay, *Beyond Mountains* (detail)

Circular wall-drawing at HICA, 2009

Here the continued historic development of the flattening of perspective may be informing in terms of the complexities it introduces into consideration of meaning, through its next evolutionary leap, relevant to the variety of forms presented in this exhibition. Greenberg considers cubist collage as a step toward a 'new sculpture', a sculptural-constructive tradition working out from the picture-plane into real space.¹⁷¹ *Complete Concrete* notes an equivalent development, with Schwitters' collages as particular examples in the origins of Concrete Poetry,¹⁷² and Greenberg again, also notes Schwitters' collages as a 'bridge from painting to sculpture'.¹⁷³ These two advances of the particular trajectory may be seen as parallel in many ways, again highly relevant here, as Finlay has quoted Edwin Morgan in suggesting the ideal concrete poem does not remain on the page, but exists in life, is 'concretely there'.¹⁷⁴

Gino Severini, *Still Life with the Newspaper 'Lacerba'*, 1913

To consider this development, it may be noted that in paintings' new-found object-nature, and in view of Krauss discussion above of collage, words may also, quite naturally it seems, be incorporated as another material. Considering how they might otherwise appear, as a rude interruption into a perspectival scene, or a

171 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.317

172 Museum Haus Konstruktiv, *Complete Concrete*, p.340

173 J. O'Brian (Ed.), op. cit. p.208

174 Quoted in K. Cockburn, & A. Finlay (Eds.) *The Order of Things*, p.19

self-conscious, didactic, intrusion in a Symbolist montage, turning either into something emblematic, reveals the success of the project to fundamentally shift the site of meaning. This, in line with Krauss' discussion, implies a revised sense of words themselves. They are no longer inert containers of 'original' meanings, but may be equally employed as active elements in an 'open play' of meaning; their scale and placing, as affective as any other graphic element; their imagined sound, something of the order of colour; the intricacies of letter forms equal details of still-life arrangements. Here then a particular form of language barrier provides another means for modernism to frustrate a literal reading and re-focus attention on other kinds of meaning.

In this way, rather than appreciate the word *Lacerba*, for example, for its original meaning, a task made difficult by its obscurity anyway,¹⁷⁵ we may appreciate it instead as an angular white area with uppercase red lettering in a jutting arrangement of an avant-garde artwork, perhaps denoting the morning newspaper folded on a café table in Paris at a particular moment in 1913, or something seeming to sound the ominous advancement of Futurism... and on from there to wherever our personal knowledge and associations may take us.

Notably, Krauss also discusses interpretations of words in cubist collages, such as newspaper titles and wine bottle labels (of which fragments of the words *Journal* and *Beaujolais* appear with the most frequency), asking whether these provide direct, often punning, meanings as 'a set of transparent signifiers',¹⁷⁶ or how else these may be judged to function:

Is the structure of cubist collage itself supportive of the semantic positivism that will allow it to be thus assimilated to the art history of the proper name? Or are the word-fragments that gather on the surfaces of Picasso's collages instead a function of a rather more exacting notion of reference, representation, and signification?¹⁷⁷

175 It is suggested that the title was taken from the poem, *L'Acerba*, written in the fourteenth century by Cecco d'Ascoli. See *Lacerba* [Online]

176 In *In the Name of Picasso*. R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.32

177 Ibid.

Krauss’ response to this question sees ‘...objections to the kind of game that literalizes the labels... giving us the “real” name...’ to instead judge the ‘... marking of the name itself with that condition of incompleteness or absence which secures for the sign its status as representation’.¹⁷⁸ The scraps of text and image become valid in their own form, which includes all their possible meanings as representation in-themselves and in their fragmentary state. There is then a ‘play of representation’¹⁷⁹ which reflects on the actual form¹⁸⁰ as it is presented. In their efforts, which she argues devalue form, Krauss is highly critical of art historical methods which seek always, and only, to identify literal meanings. These are ‘... a massive misreading of the processes of signification and a reduction of the visual sign to an insistent mouthing of proper names’.¹⁸¹

Juan Gris, *Bottle of Rosé Wine*, 1914

178 Ibid., p.34
179 Ibid., p.37
180 Ibid., p.40
181 Ibid.

This apparent seeking of validity ‘in their own form’ appears consistent then with the intended further step out from the canvas and into the world of objects. These examples by Severeni and Gris, appear to be teetering on the brink, contemplating an equivalent jump to Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés*, considering whether they can take this risk, being open to what a new form might be, uncertain of how, or if, they might still function.¹⁸²

1.52 A new constructive sculptural tradition: real space and the temporal

Aleksandr Rodchenko
L: *Spatial Construction*, 1921
R: *Spatial Construction/Spatial Object*, 1921

As Greenberg describes, in sculpture, the diminishing relevance of a figurative tradition, is suddenly superseded by a new constructive approach, developed independently through this direction, and beginning with painting: ‘...contemporary advanced sculpture was able, via the collage, to attend itself to painting and take its point of departure from that medium rather than from anything antecedent in its own medium’.¹⁸³ He further states; ‘The new sculpture really begins with Braque’s and Picasso’s cubist collages, springing up out of a mode of painting that thrusts forms outward from the picture-plane...’¹⁸⁴ or again; ‘The picture had now

182 Mallarmé acknowledges his own uncertainties regarding what future forms might result from his own innovations. See H. Weinfeld, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems*, p.265
183 J. O’Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.208
184 Ibid., p. 317

attained to the full and declared three-dimensionality we automatically attribute to the notion “object”, and painting was being transformed, in the course of a strictly coherent process with a logic all of its own, into a new kind of sculpture.¹⁸⁵ This new sculpture’s being an equal part of reality is then its perceived advantage over painting. It is ‘...delivered... into the positive truth of free space...’¹⁸⁶ By this move, for Greenberg (and here might be judged a distinct point which Krauss’ discussions above seek to develop) the work, as object, is freed from representation: ‘And it is here precisely that its advantage over modern painting, as far as a range of expression is concerned, lies.’¹⁸⁷

The artworks themselves, perhaps navigating between these tendencies in relation to representation, certainly do appear at least to implicate, through their real space development, not only the wider aspects of the space they find themselves in, but also a fourth dimension; their temporal context.

Vladimir Tatlin, *Corner Counter-Relief*, 1914-15

Krauss outlines the divergence in approaches and resulting meanings she judges at this point in the development of sculpture, in her chapter, titled *Analytic Space*, in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, looking at, among others, the examples of Gabo and Tatlin. Here she makes the distinction between real and transcendent space,

185 Ibid., p. 261

186 Ibid., p. 317

187 Ibid., pp. 317-318

determining that ‘Gabo’s notion of “the real”’ (given his text, titled the *Realistic Manifesto*) ‘was obviously directed toward the revelation of a transcendent reality rather than a manifestation of factual reality’.¹⁸⁸ Counter to this, ‘Tatlin’s edict of “real space and real materials” results... in a work ideologically opposed to Gabo’s...’.¹⁸⁹ Their works thus promote ‘an entirely different attitude toward the notion of time. The transparency of Gabo’s *Column*... presents the viewer with a perceptual synthesis in which past and future moments are collapsed. One view of the object is presented as the sum of all possible views...’¹⁹⁰ ... ‘In this single view, the experience of time and space is both summarized and transcended.’¹⁹¹ In contrast, Tatlin is concerned with the experience of real time, ‘... the function of Tatlin’s corner is to insist that the relief it holds is continuous with the space of the world and dependent upon it for its meaning.’¹⁹² These two positions present this distinction, which Greenberg does not appear to make. Terming the New Sculpture as ‘pictorial, draftsman’s sculpture’,¹⁹³ he suggests that modern painting, sculpture (and architecture), tend to treat all matter as two-dimensional;

Matter is analysed into points, lines and surfaces of planes that are meant to be felt as without thickness and possessing the hypothetically absolute two-dimensionality of demonstrations in plane geometry. It is by virtue of this immateriality, this urge to reduce their plastic elements to the minimum of substance needed to body forth visibility, that modern architecture and sculpture can be with the greatest justice termed “abstract”.¹⁹⁴

As with Krauss’ observation regarding Gabo’s intent, Greenberg allows the sense that this modern sculpture permits ‘...space to enter into its core and the core to reach out into and organize the ambience.’¹⁹⁵

188 R. E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, p.57

189 Ibid., p.61

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid., p.62

192 Ibid., p.55

193 J. O’Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.317

194 Ibid., pp.324-325

195 Ibid., p.324

For Krauss this step into temporal context is the moment of fundamental change, in her argument for the development towards phenomenological experience of sculpture, and, she suggests, is only properly engaged once Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* enters the consciousness of American artists in the 1960s, twenty years after its first publication, and with its translation into English.¹⁹⁶ And it is precisely this shift that Foster suggests for those such as Fried, as well as Greenberg, represents a transgression which '...obtains only the literalism of a frameless event of object "as it happens, as it merely is." Fried terms this minimalist literalism "theatrical" because it involves mundane time, a property that he deems improper to visual art.'¹⁹⁷ Foster states that for Fried, '...the old Enlightenment order of the arts (the temporal versus the spatial arts) is endangered. This is why "theatre is now the negation of art," and why minimalism must be condemned.'¹⁹⁸

While I suggest the argument here as illuminating in regard to the manner of development out from the picture-plane, and especially so in relation to what I note above, as Krauss' view enabling the poetic play of uncertainty of meaning, I feel it is also worthy of note that for an artist such as van Doesburg,¹⁹⁹ the step out from the picture-plane into the dimensions of real space and time is basic in their concerns in painting, sculpture and especially in architecture, twenty years ahead of Merleau-Ponty, and forty years before the minimalists. For example, van Doesburg's point No.10 in *Towards a Plastic Architecture*, of 1924, headed *Space and Time*: 'The new architecture calculates not only with space but also with time as an architectural value. The unity of space and time will give architectural form a new and completely plastic aspect, that is, a four-dimensional, plastic space-time aspect.'²⁰⁰ Van Doesburg, as will later be explored, is essentially disposed towards the real, opposed to notions of transcendence, and thus provides what may be another possible position, extra to Krauss' outlining, and from which he actually makes highly critical comments of Tatlin's work. He states:

196 Discussed in *Richard Serra, a Translation* in R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, pp.262-263

197 H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.52

198 Ibid.

199 Hans Richter's sense of the development of a new 'space-time consciousness' is a further clear example. D. Mertins & M. Jennings (Eds.) *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film*, p.16

200 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.144

...we must first destroy the use of a static axis in contempt for the Euclidean view of life (which relates to the static point). With the use of a relief medium, this goal should prove easily attainable; however, this relief medium calls to mind too specifically an ornamental plate and, by extension, the art of Russia. The Russian sculptor, Tatlin, called his bent-metal reliefs 'counter-reliefs'. They nevertheless possessed no quality of counter-plastic form, since Tatlin, who was a romanticist, understood neither the problem of modern plastic form nor that of architecture. This is sufficiently proved by his spiral, baroque monument, which by reason of the illogical composition of its spaces and elements, is actually symbolic! (Russian muddle-headedness and snobbish braggadocio aimed at impressing teenagers!)²⁰¹

It is very significant that in these two sample quotes van Doesburg indicates his modern and non-Euclidean understanding of a fourth dimension, as space-time.

1.53 Complexities of meaning: works located in the here and now

Here, Alec Finlay's and Alexander and Susan Maris' exhibition provides a moment to briefly reflect on this development from picture-plane, through collage and into a fourth dimension, as originating circumstances for forms such as poem-objects. The Marises' works, for example, employ various states, from the textual account of their explorations, to the presentation of various objects and the direct engaging of this new element of time, both in their video works (emphasising this element by forcing the viewers' appreciation of the time taken in boiling the kettles) and in the significance of the effects of this time, expressed by the variations of the resulting scorch-marks.

The larger poetic methodologies of their, and Finlay's, works, then appear, rather than the presentation of sole and limited original meanings, as an open play of meaning, through various elements, which permits the enfolding of all these into an awareness of the time the work is seen within; the conditions at the particular moment of viewing; and the nature of our subjective responses to that time.

201 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.160-161

Alexander and Susan Maris
still from *Heather Tea on Rannoch Moor*

Their theories, the consideration of artefacts linked to this investigation and to Beuys (fishing gear, felt hat etc), the aesthetic appreciation of their video works, or the elegant arrangement of kettles, are all subsumed into other questioning states. The sense of these states, hovering around the works and exhibition, from what may be discerned from the various clues, reflect the kinds of questions they feel able to pose about the nature of reality: the 'scientific' approach to examining the particularity of burn-marks, the logic of the dispersal of Beuys' gelatine, suggest clear links to absolute but unknowable circumstance. The Marises' highlight their awareness of the infinitesimal scale at which these things occur, the immense consequent complexities of understandings of time and place. As the title for their retrospective exhibition at Stills gallery *The Pursuit of Fidelity*, held in 2010²⁰² seems to clarify, responses around this pursuit and its possibly tragic nature, for both hunter and quarry, appears their sense of where the meaning of this work is 'actually' located.

202 30 July – 24 October 2010. The exhibition title is taken from 'a 15th Century tapestry in the Burrell Collection that shows a pair of lovers following a stag through a forest. Woven into the small German wall hanging is the caption: "we are searching for fidelity and if we find it we would rather live in no dearer time". Stills, *Alexander and Susan Maris: The pursuit of Fidelity (a retrospective)*, text inside front cover.

Here, given this concern with works' temporal nature, as part of the 'shape' of moments within what would appear implied as a continual morphological flux, I would highlight my use again, as the title for this chapter, of HICA's opening exhibition title *Concrete Now!*, as reflecting something of this temporal focus in regard to meaning (and, as transforming sculptural moments, consistent with the Marises concerns, for example, with Beuys), while further offering a sense of a survey of some current artistic activity that may be related to ideas of 'the concrete'.

1.6 HICA exhibition: David Bellingham

40w 60w 100w, 28 June – 2 August 2009

1.61 Encountering difficulties: representation, complexity: the high- to post- modern

These few examples of exhibitions so far demonstrate differing continuing concerns with ideas of materiality, but in each case throw up apparent difficulties for their works' consideration as such: seemingly unavoidable conceptual readings, or the impossible complexity and ephemerality of contextual and temporal meanings.

Alexei Gan considers that, up till the time he was writing, in the early 1920s, art movements had failed to 'sever the umbilical cord that still held and joined them to the traditional art of the Old Believers. Constructivism' he maintains 'has played the role of midwife'.²⁰³ This umbilical cord might now seem a Hydra, regenerating itself in new ways. Perhaps this sense of severance and radical progression has itself been an illusion; either the attempts at severance were utopian or, as Hal Foster considers, commenting on Peter Bürger's sense of failure of the avant-garde, it may perhaps have only ever been a prompt, intending a critique of the institution of art.²⁰⁴

There would of course be competing intentions and views at the time of Gan's writing. What seem the standard interpretations of the resulting historical shifts are perhaps the most useful thing to consider, and here I would suggest Foster's

203 S. Bann (ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.41

204 H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.57

outlining of a transcendent and formalist modern to an immanent and avant-gardist postmodern as representative of an apparent orthodoxy forging a dynamic through the Twentieth Century;²⁰⁵ moving from a High- modernist period, of autonomous artworks having utopian intent, and based on a quest for objectivity in the realisation of entities equivalent to notions such as Platonic Forms,²⁰⁶ to a position, exemplified by Krauss, where the phenomenological understanding of Minimalist artworks indicates the breakdown of this quest, opening the door to subjectivity, the uncertain and arbitrary. The difference here is summed up by Foster as that between compelling conviction and casting doubt, between seeking the essential and revealing the conditional,²⁰⁷ or again as ‘the poststructuralist shift from transcendental causes to immanent effects’.²⁰⁸

This shift appears in many ways reminiscent of the turnaround discussed in relation to Symbolist painting; from inner to outer, but is conducted as a more complete cultural project, more widely accepted and applied, bolstered by parallel developments of structuralism and poststructuralism. The focus becomes expressly the absence of (inner/transcendent) presence, previously understood as fundamental to meaning. Instead the turn is made to understanding meaning through relation to context, or within, in Foucault’s terms, discourse.²⁰⁹ Krauss’ introduction to *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths* gives a very helpful outlining of her thought here. She identifies Greenberg’s *Art and Culture* as a system for artists in the 1960s ‘through which to think the field of modernist art’;²¹⁰ then states that a ‘radical inversion of the position on which *Art and Culture* depended’ occurred through the influence of structuralism and then poststructuralism;

On the one hand, structuralism rejected the historicist model as the

205 H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.58

206 Thomas McEvilley notes, for instance, in his introduction to Brian O’Doherty’s *Inside the White Cube*, p.11, a development away from the Platonic and transcendental as a ‘controlling structure behind modernist aesthetics.’

207 H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.58

208 Ibid., p.68.

209 ‘Foucault’s thesis is that individual statements, or the chances that individual authors can make individual statements, are not really likely. Over and above every opportunity for saying something there stands a regularizing collectivity which in his more recent work Foucault has called a discourse, itself governed by the archive.’ E. Said, *The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions*, p.90

210 R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.1

means to understand the generation of meaning. On the other, within the work of poststructuralism, those timeless, trans-historical forms, which had been seen as the indestructible categories wherein aesthetic development took place, were themselves opened to historical analysis and placement.²¹¹

Thus, while she suggests that ‘the art of the last hundred and thirty years, the art of modernism, is not being well served by writing that promotes the myths through which it can be consistently misread’;²¹² she also sees that modernist art ‘appears to have come to closure’, and that it is then ‘from within the perspective of postmodernist production’ that the terrain of structuralist and poststructuralist analysis may be entered.²¹³

The sense of this dynamic is a further basic point of reference for what I aim to consider through the rest of this text, proposing that, as with Krauss’ comment above, there perhaps is a consistent misreading of modernism, that this dynamic is, in-itself, a part of. It may mask what seems a more useful reading of a still developing modernism.

1.62 A point of resulting malaise?

The malaise I have wished to identify in this chapter appears most visibly a result of artists feeling left in the wake of this dynamic. Through the 1990s, as Foster describes, there are a range of attempts by artists to find their feet again in a void of being even post appropriation and pastiche.²¹⁴

Here I would consider David Bellingham’s works in relation to a range of possibilities: In his exhibition Bellingham presented photographic records of ephemeral arrangements of objects (fruit, with text additions, and espresso coffee-pots), paint-splash images as indexes of actions performed in some of these photographs (the boiling of ‘espressos’ of poster-paint in primary colours) actual

211 Ibid., p.2

212 Ibid., p.5

213 Ibid., p.6

214 Foster specifically considers the ‘traps’ for work that followed appropriation in *The Return of the Real*, pp.118-119, as part of his wider discussion.

arrangements of objects as modest interventions both in the gallery space and as a larger, more dispersed, installation within the garden surrounding the gallery, as well as an installation of 365 photographic presentations of the handwritten word 'days', which occupied the smaller gallery space at HICA.

David Bellingham, 365 Days, Installation view, 2009

The acuteness of observation and brevity in the poetic connections that Bellingham's works make places them perhaps closer to Alec Finlay's poem-objects and interests in haiku than the more open and uncertain musings of Richard Couzins, though their play on understandings of form, content, and unlikely association, their stretching to near breaking-point of poetic simile, relates them to comparable areas of semiotic and semantic interest, with Couzins.

There are also elements present that position this work critically in relation to the dynamic of High and Post modern, through the presence of measurement, a pre-occupying theme in Bellingham's works. Here it takes the form of days measuring a year, or the differing angles of various wedges placed in relation to actual physical spaces, as well as the employment of primary colours as measure, in their supposed more essential nature.

In many ways the works appear to dwell on the trauma of this dynamic's progression: the daily grind of coffee, days being counted, the sense of play with 'homely' and toy-like materials: fruit, handwritten scraps, wedges and cable-ties. Rather than simply seeming charming and childlike, or affecting infantilism as subversive

strategy, as Foster suggests is the case for artists like Mike Kelley,²¹⁵ working through the wake of the postmodern, there is more a sense of the humdrum and of doodling, in a way asking, 'what else can be done?'

David Bellingham, 90 degrees, 2009

This may well be a reasonable question to pose at any point in history, and here its defeatism appears employed as part of the works poetry, its pathos. Though through comments made in the essay by Sarah Lowndes, which reflected on the show, this sense seems especially pointed in relation to the context of the modern to postmodern. Bellingham's works are discussed as in part a response to Mondrian's, where Lowndes notes a 'conflicted admiration'.²¹⁶ Where Mondrian is quoted as claiming to paint in order to 'find things out',²¹⁷ Bellingham states his desire instead to 'make something I don't understand':²¹⁸ the works wish to open up the gaps between reductive theory and pluralistic experience. Thus the focus on measurement, as a concept underscoring this discrepancy, and highlighting the pathos in modernist attempts at objectivity.²¹⁹

David Bellingham, sloping to a thin edge, 2009

215 H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.159

216 HICA, *Four Exhibitions: October 2008 – August 2009*, p.33

217 Ibid., p.31

218 Ibid.

219 Van Doesburg, for instance states, in his *Comments on the basis of concrete painting*, that 'everything is measurable, even spirit with its one hundred and ninety-nine dimensions.' J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.182

1.63 Alternative 'concrete' developments: possible responses to the high- to post-modern

Bellingham's works are also not pastiche or appropriation, such as with an artist like Halley,²²⁰ though. They seem more sincere comment, oriented by these references, and by this appear in sympathy with alternative developments of concrete understandings, apparent and highly influential, especially from the middle of the last century. A few examples:

The Gutai Group, in Japan (Gutai can translate as 'concrete'²²¹) made, from the early 1950s, performative artworks²²² that, in line with Jiro Yoshihara's statement in the *Gutai Manifesto* of 1956, searched 'for a centrifugal approach, instead of the centripetal one seen in abstract art'.²²³ They felt affinity with Jackson Pollock²²⁴ (their paintings being very gestural), and comparison might be made here in Bellingham's show, with his espresso splash pieces; as Mondrian meets Pollock. Gutai developed significant dialogue between their own activities and those involved, for instance, in the New York art scene of the time, such as Allan Kaprow,²²⁵ appealing to Kaprow's ideas of 'real' engagement, and his sense of this developing via Cubism, Dada and Surrealism.²²⁶ The mention here of Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism would be anathema to the more established view of a rational Concrete Art. (Though, as earlier noted, Max Bill had made attempts to accommodate Pollock's works within Concrete Art, and Karl Gerstner, considering the inaccuracy of the term Abstract Expressionism, has also commented, 'what in the world is abstract in Jackson Pollock's paintings?'²²⁷)

Öyvind Fahlström identifies a sense close to Hans Prinzhorn's definition of a process of psychic expression, in his artworks, in which pictorial gestures become "elementary graphic concretizations";²²⁸ a sense which Fahlström develops beyond Surrealist automatism and toward 'the schematization of the

220 Foster comments on Halley; H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.99

221 K. Stiles, & P. Selz (Eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, p.697

222 Ibid., p.680

223 C. Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, p.207

224 M. Tiampo, *Under Each Other's Spell: Gutai and New York*, p.13

225 Ibid., p.9

226 A. Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, pp.157-158

227 K. Gerstner, *Review of 5x10 Years of Graphic Design Etc.*, p.241

228 MACBA, *Öyvind Fahlström - Another Space for Painting*, p.10

sign as an elementary graphic – or plastic – concretization'.²²⁹ He becomes a 'poet-painter',²³⁰ formulating his own vision of a concrete poetry, via Dada and Surrealist roots, and producing his *Manifesto for Concrete Poetry*, in 1953,²³¹ three years earlier than Augusto de Campos. 'For him, concrete art is primarily an experience of the concretization of language on the page, in a play of alterations and metamorphoses... his model is musical more than pictorial...' and 'he stands apart from non-figurative, geometrical concrete art...' ²³²

David Bellingham, *powder paint espresso*, 2008

As direct reaction to the dogmatic approaches of Constructivism, Ferreira Gullar's *Neo-concrete Manifesto*, of 1959, states the Neo-Concretists' distance from "geometric" art (Neo-Plasticism, Constructivism, Suprematism, and the Ulm School) and, particularly, in Concrete art, taken to a dangerously rationalist extreme'.²³³ The critic Mario Pedrosa has described probably the best known of the Neo-Concretists, Hélio Oiticica's, 'post-modern' development,²³⁴ from a Constructivist mode to performative situations, such as the wearing of *Parangoles*, coloured capes with direct social and political meaning.²³⁵ Another of the artists

229 Ibid.

230 Ibid., p.11

231 Ibid., p.51

232 Ibid., p.11

233 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, p.80

234 A. Dezeuze, (2004) *Tactile Dematerialization, sensory politics: Hélio Oiticica's Parangoles*, Art Journal, Vol. 63, No.2, Summer 2004, p.60

235 Ibid.

most prominent in Neo-Concretism, Lygia Pape's *Ballets Neoconcretos*, have been noted as a clear parallel, in their form and intentions, to Minimalism's phenomenological shift.²³⁶ These highly choreographed performances, of 1958 and 1959,²³⁷ '...rectilinear, without curves, without physical or expressive exuberance'²³⁸ and with performers concealed within simple geometric shapes as coloured volumes, have 'striking poetic affinities'²³⁹ with, and slightly pre-date, Robert Morris's *Column* performance, discussed by Krauss²⁴⁰ in terms clearly consistent with her identification of postmodern practice.²⁴¹

And alongside these examples of more certain connections and developments there may be observed the general influence of these (such as noted above regarding Kaprow), and related approaches to the 'real', in a melting pot of ideas that groups such as Nouveau Réalisme, Fluxus and Arte Povera were also orientating by.

1.64 The role of irrationality in alternative concrete approaches

To consider then a couple of characteristics in Bellingham's exhibition that might appear sympathetic to these examples, but which, I feel it is important to note, negotiate somehow between what we might consider the rational and irrational:

The first of these concerns individuality and ideas of expression. Individuality is perceived as a problem for the universal and generalising language of Constructivism.²⁴² Some return to artists being, as with Augusto de Campos' earlier quoted comment,²⁴³ the 'workman of art' is instead envisaged, in ways that blur art and life, especially carrying over artistic agendas into areas of design. Max Bill,

236 Luiz Camillo Osorio, in Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, p.104

237 Ibid., p.103

238 Ibid., p.104

239 Ibid.

240 For example, R. E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, pp.239-240

241 R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.287

242 De Stijl, for instance, variously argue against Individualism. See for example their *Statement of the De Stijl Group* of 1922, in S. Bann (ed.) *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.65

243 See section 0.19

for instance, states a difficulty with the term 'artist'; his work the, 'very antithesis of the cult of intuition',²⁴⁴ and seeks a relation more in-line with the Bauhaus proclamation, of 1919, "Architects, painters, sculptors – we must all return to the handicrafts."²⁴⁵ Measurement requires an equivalent restriction of expression as this absorption of the individual artist into wider culture. Bill, again, equates art with laws of Order,²⁴⁶ a state which necessitates individuality, in the making of art, to be subsumed to Order. The more 'centrifugally' concerned, may seem diametrically opposed here, in tending to suggest that the focus of art should remain with the individual. As Gullar also states, they seek something which "'understands" the expressive potential' of their works.²⁴⁷ But this may actually be only a question of degree. Bill has again, for instance, stated that Concrete Art, '...tends toward the universal and yet cultivates the unique, it rejects individuality, but for the benefit of the individual',²⁴⁸ or elsewhere that 'art is unthinkable without the effort of the individual'.²⁴⁹ And there seems no desire from these more expressive groupings to move too far away from this, in the direction of purely personal meanings. Bellingham's show, as example, still orientates its meanings through reference to a sense of objectivity and thus Bill's 'Order'.

The second, related observation is then of Bellingham's application of a 'rule of three'. This runs through various aspects, the most obvious being the use of the primary colours, in the painted wedges, and in the necessarily three 'espressos', but also there are the three types of fruit overwritten with the developing tag-line, '40w, 60w, 100w'.

David Bellingham, *40w 60w 100w*, 2008

244 E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.25

245 Ibid.

246 Ibid., p.154

247 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, p.80

248 E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.61

249 Ibid., p.155

This noted technique of public speaking is also that of surreal juxtaposition, (the Comte de Lautremont's ironing-board, sewing-machine, dissecting-table) as well as the three-line structure of haiku, all... three... of these examples highlighting the economy of three elements to create a structure that resolves, but always remains interestingly off-balance, never quite adding up. Lucy Lippard notes, for instance, the historical pervasiveness of this relation: 'Measures of three – the most elementary number system – predominate in Neolithic planning. Most cultures seemed to believe, with Lao Tzu: "Tao generates one. One generates two. Two generates three. Three generates all things."' ²⁵⁰

There were more subtle manifestations of this as an organising principle in Bellingham's exhibition: the spatial arrangement of works (through the small space, large space and then garden); and something in-keeping in the jaunty, more 'organic' angles that the *365 Days* photographs were hung at and the wedges, inserted beneath stones in the garden, created.

This certainly odd, though not properly irrational, number might simply seem a rule of thumb, not on the scale of a fundamental principle, though even as such, it remains important as worked out through practical involvement in the real world, relevant to Bellingham's sense of measurement. But there are links both perceptually, as a rule of composition, a 'working' equivalent to the golden section ²⁵¹ and conceptually, to a sense of dialectic processes, that do indicate something more essentially grounded. The creating of a dynamic tension between two elements, which then resolves, makes important connection to philosophical positions, most clearly that of Hegel (highly relevant to the work of De Stijl), where opposing arguments form a new overall unity. These aspects I will further discuss, but here would make this point as the manifestation of Bellingham's methods seeking a more 'natural' basis perhaps, but still, within this, engaging a sense of the objective.

²⁵⁰ L. R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, p.82

²⁵¹ the properly irrational ratio, a proportion manifested variously in nature and employed through history, notably by those such as Ancient Egyptian and Greek sculptors. See for example E. Lucie-Smith, *Dictionary of Art Terms*, pp.40; 90

1.7 Point of Reflection: an observed continuing sense of malaise; its historic roots

The progression of modernism appears intimately bound up with a move away from the fictional and towards the factual, in Greenberg's terms, ²⁵² until, as he also notes in *The Decline of Cubism*, the faltering of the Cubist project from around 1930. ²⁵³ Growing doubts about art's potential to pursue the factual sees a particular loss of nerve on the part of the major artists involved (Greenberg includes the Constructivists and all similarly progressive artists under the banner of Cubism). The trajectory is retreated from as if the path is no longer clear, or the conclusions now drawn, too problematic.

If this chapter is a statement of the problem, then I suggest the real sense of malaise hovering still in the background to contemporary works echoes, at least, this same decline; the Marises *Pursuit of Fidelity*, as example, a slightly wistful looking-back, something of a lost cause; the only available certainty, a contingent one, as knowledge of the pursuit itself.

From this discussion of the exhibitions of Suchin, Couzins, Finlay, the Marises, and Bellingham, my aim has been to demonstrate the continuing concern of artists with ideas of materiality, how these may relate to, and rely on discoveries of this early modern period, while also in each case suggesting difficulties they may still see in developing any further the prior trajectory: the inability to avoid conceptual readings, as example, in Peter Suchin's and Richard Couzins' works, the impossible complexity of real-space and temporal meanings in Alec Finlay's and Alexander and Susan Maris' works, and, in relation to David Bellingham's exhibition, the difficulties in the identifications of the periods of High and Post-modernism, worked through since this moment of decline, identified by Greenberg. In each case, it seems, any apparently trustworthy 'real' direction is thwarted.

²⁵² See J. O'Brian, (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.314

²⁵³ Ibid., pp.212-214



The conversion of the larger gallery space at HICA, Spring 2010

2 The Nature of Process

2.1 An introduction to the themes of this chapter: the potential for artworks to affect change; a consideration of chance and the 'irrational' within processes of change; a further exploration of art's relation to science.

Psychic TV's track *Message From the Temple*, in pseudo self-help-tape style, contains the spoken lyrics:

...focus the will on one's true desires in the belief, gathered from experience, that this maximises and makes happen all those things that one wants in every area of life... gradually focussing on what you would really like to happen in a perfect world, a perfect situation... The mere visualization of that true goal begins the process that makes it happen... once you have focussed on yourself internally the external aspects of your life will fall into place – they have to...¹

The track states this as a 'psychic process'.

I include this fairly random example to illustrate an equal understanding of art as part of a process, envisaging and enacting change in the world, a process which this chapter will variously consider. The inner and 'psychic' process the track describes may be judged to have a lot in common with the intentions of artists such as Mondrian, almost willing the 'modern' into being, through their artwork. Greenberg says, for example, '...the final intention of [Mondrian's] work is to expand painting into the décor of the man-made world...' ² and, '...space outside [artworks] is transformed by their presence.'³ Artworks are realised speculative desires, intending change to the situation they find themselves within.

The suggestion here is that the reification involved, the forming of an equal material part of the world, the creation of an artwork as a form which emanates

¹ Psychic TV, lyrics from *Message From the Temple*

² J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.188

³ Ibid.

intellect,⁴ may act something like a seed crystal, activating the formation of other materials around it: Greenberg's comment again regarding modern art and architecture, that permits '...space to enter into its core and the core to reach out into and organize the ambience.'⁵ Thus, 'Art should shape and organize daily life, not decorate it,' becomes the motto of the Arte Concreto Invención movement, of Argentina, for example.⁶

Brian O'Doherty makes highly critical comments of this notion; what he sees as an archetype of modernism: '...the artist who, unaware of his minority, sees the social structure as alterable through art', whose 'rational, reformist urge refers to the age of reason and is nourished on the utopian habit' behaves, for O'Doherty, just as 'a discreetly authoritarian socialist.'⁷

Highlighting doubts, in turn, of the postmodern basis to O'Doherty's view, this chapter reflects again on this question. In a development of points, especially those opened up through discussion of David Bellingham's exhibition at HICA, of the perhaps more 'natural', less rational basis to concrete art intentions, moves that have been interpreted as part of the origination of postmodernism, this chapter considers chance and the 'irrational' as basic within wider nature, and therefore as aspects of materiality (connecting these considerations also to questions within science). It will thus explore how the acceptance of processes of nature, incorporating 'chance', may still judge some potential for the active role of artworks within it. That is, aware of the development through a usual sense of what may be termed Process Art, from what Krauss describes as the dialogue between artist, their materials and the conditions of making,⁸ reflecting on the basic, cultural transformations of raw materials, to the wider sense of the 'context-dependent contingency of all objects to the conditions of their making'⁹ this chapter seeks to present a more complex understanding of an overall process,

4 For instance, van Doesburg states 'Spirit... needs a clear, intellectual means of expression in order to manifest itself concretely', and 'a work of art thus conceived will manifest the principle of clarity which will serve as the basis for a new culture.' J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.181-182

5 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.324

6 C. Damian, (2005) *Utopia of Form, Argentine Concrete Art*, pp.162-163

7 B. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, p.82

8 R. E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, p.272

9 Kristine Stiles, in K. Stiles & P. Selz (Eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, p.577

that incorporates some aspect of these earlier 'modern' transformative ambitions.

John Cage's comment 'the real world...becomes... not an object [but] a process'¹⁰ thus indicates some conclusion here, which as Kristine Stiles elaborates '... must entail the random, indeterminate, and chance aspects of nature and culture'.¹¹ In this, 'behavioural processes continually inform a work of art as an objective state or completed thing'.¹² This understanding of process and our making of artworks within it, may then more clearly define the sense of the wider 'discursive flow',¹³ or 'that form of inter-human negotiation that Marcel Duchamp called "the coefficient of art", which is a temporal process, being played out here and now.'¹⁴ It is the looking forward from this point, seeing the development of the artwork and its potential for activity within this temporal process that may then become the focus.

To begin, I suggest the questions: if some form of 'process that makes it happen...' (as with Psychic TV's instructions) can be accepted within this, how might this then be judged; as mystical or material? And; how might artistic experience of this then reflect on art's relation to science?

2.2 HICA exhibition: Jeremy Millar, 2 May – 6 June, 2010

2.21 Mystic or Rationalist?

"Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach"¹⁵

In 2011 Millar took part in an exhibition at Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, entitled *Mystics or Rationalists?*¹⁶ His contribution comprised of four mirrored cubes,

10 Ibid., p.682

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Bryson's term again, as earlier noted in section 0.18, note 70.

14 Bourriaud's comment, also noted, section 0.18, note 70. From N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.41

15 Sol LeWitt, *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, 1971, quoted in Ingleby Gallery's *Mystics or Rationalists?* exhibition press release.

16 Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, 4 August – 22 October, 2011

each sitting on a bed of rock salt. The work referenced Robert Morris's mirror-cube sculptures from 1965, and explored 'the relationship between minimal and conceptual art, and, with their coating of purifying salt, the world of ritual and magic.'¹⁷ The exhibition centred on a consideration of the above statement by LeWitt.

This further occasion for questioning the rational and objective, or irrational and subjective, equally reflects on Millar's show at HICA, which seemed also a too-close-to-call presentation of this: which side does Millar feel himself to be on?

Posing the question in the previous chapter, of the 'inner' or 'outer' Symbolist route for meaning, asks if artworks make some appeal to a world beyond, the supernatural, or have solely worldly, physical, explanations of meaning. Another equivalent consideration might be that of automatism. Does this align with 'messages from the other side'; Breton's employing this method of the spiritualists, as a 'substitution of psychic reality for external reality',¹⁸ presumed then to be in accord with Apollinaire's sur- realism,¹⁹ or does it align more as a 'stream of consciousness',²⁰ and perhaps then with Bataille's sub- realism, that as Foster notes, is focused on 'the materialist low more than the idealist high' (a 'high' which Bataille associated with Breton).²¹ Here, if I presume the latter sub-realism, then this statement of LeWitt's may be reflected on as comment that the logic employed in the development of an artwork may be other than that which we might commonly understand as a rational, systematized, process.

In my introduction to HICA's 2010 publication I note a connecting sense between the exhibitions through the year, of an 'interplay between randomness and specificity: random processes of making producing highly specific results... the formulation of highly specific processes in order to produce a certain randomness of results.'²² Some random element in the processes of making, therefore, I suggest as very relevant to the exhibitions under consideration in this chapter, and the question might then be whether the irrational can be considered an

17 Ingleby Gallery, *Mystics or Rationalists?* exhibition press release.

18 A. Breton, *Artistic Genesis...*, in P. Waldberg, *Surrealism*, p.84

19 E. Lucie-Smith, *Dictionary of Art Terms*, p.181

20 the term introduced by William James, in 1890. J. Pearsall & B. Trumble (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, p.1429

21 H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.144

22 HICA, *Exhibitions 2010*, p.7

element in a material process?

2.22 The irrational as part of the material? Interventions of consciousness

The works in Millar's exhibition at HICA focused on exhibiting and considering processes of chance, the random and irrational. His text for the press release stated 'Here, and elsewhere in the exhibition, [the] work is a simple invitation for us to consider that which lies beyond the most immediately apparent.'²³ Reflecting on the year as a whole, this intention can appear very close to that of Boyle Family's installation, the last show in this series, which I will come on to discuss, a work that was ostensibly just the view from the large window at HICA. This Boyle Family work opens up to the viewer's own speculation, in some way to reflect back their own considerations, an aim which seems especially close here to Millar's *Mirror of Ink*, though Millar employs an overtly 'occult' language through which to approach the same state.²⁴

Jeremy Millar, Installation view with *Mirror of Ink*, 2010

23 See Millar's exhibition press release; Appendix A

24 reference may again be made here to Krauss' essay *Grids*, and its discussion of Symbolism's employing of imagery of windows and mirrors; stating their distance from "reality" and the mundane, while exploring their 'schizophrenic' development, and thus the progression of their contrary material concerns, into modernist forms such as the grid. R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, pp.16;18

This piece explored Millar's,

interest in Chinese aesthetics, and in the occult practice of scrying, by which spiritual visions, of the past, present, or future, are observed in a medium; whether stones such as obsidian, water, or ink, an activity that has been noted in almost all cultures. In this new work, a small Chinese 'Hare's Fur' bowl from the Song dynasty (960–1279) is placed before the large window of the gallery, looking out onto the landscape beyond; into this is placed a freshly ground solution of Chinese ink, thereby creating a black reflective surface such as might be used for observing psychic visions²⁵

Here a metaphoric use of scrying reflects, as 'mirror', back onto the viewer's own perception of the work, presenting a question of consciousness in what is perceived: 'that which lies beyond' as inner, or outer? By implication, it questions whether our consciousness is a part of, or separate from, the material world. But, again, the work itself leaves this open... and this is my reading...

The overall intention of the show was to consider 'a sense of emergence, or unforeseen development, which is central to the creative process, no matter how pre-planned the work in question'.²⁶ *Mirror of Ink* hands this state on to the viewer. The development of an artwork through a creative process appears clearly enough a forward progression, in terms of time. There seems a common sense notion that the viewer then looks back somehow to the realised and 'finished' work, the artwork a full-stop in terms of temporal development. If this backward perception by the audience (a sense of regression that is illustrated by scenes in perspective, for example) is by some operation of the artwork reversed, then viewers are placed so as to be equally looking forward through its process, its 'unforeseen development', seen to continue in the sense they make and take forward from it. This is, indeed, a standard intention of forms of contemporary art that may be judged 'participatory': works of art as beginnings of sentences that are completed by the audience, as Fabrice Hyber describes,²⁷ and which Bourriaud further states as;

²⁵ See Millar's exhibition press release; Appendix A

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Exhibition leaflet for Fabrice Hyber's *Raw Materials* exhibition at Baltic, 22 March – 30 June, 2013

...not the simple secondary effects of a composition, as the formalistic aesthetic would like to advance, but the principle acting as a trajectory evolving through signs, objects, forms, gestures... The contemporary artwork's form is spreading out from its material form: it is a linking element, a principle of dynamic agglutination. An artwork is a dot on a line.²⁸

Three main characteristics of this development are somewhat critically identified by Claire Bishop,²⁹ as 'activation; authorship; community': the creating of an active subject, the ceding of 'some or all' authorship of the work to them, and through this the engaging of a sense of collective responsibility for the shape that things take; including the artwork, and ultimately, the way the (at least human) world is.

Two other works in the show combined with this sense of emergence to more clearly define this process's nature:

Millar's continuing series of drawings *Neutral (diluted)* consider François Jullien's presentation of the Chinese notion of blandness (dan) as 'markedly different from its perception in the West; whereas we might consider it as a lack of defining qualities, within Chinese aesthetics it is considered the balanced and unnameable union of all possible values; as richness'.³⁰ Through connection also to an anecdote regarding Roland Barthes and his inspiration for writing *The Neutral*³¹ these drawings 'attempt to represent such a notion'³² of the Neutral, or of blandness, which is considered in Chinese aesthetics the undifferentiated foundation of reality.³³ As single dots of ink on an otherwise blank page, they are thus suggested as the opposite of full-stops, becoming instead perhaps Zero-points, aligned with these aesthetic notions as 'the point of origin of all things possible'.³⁴ This

²⁸ N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp.20-21

²⁹ in her introduction to the Whitechapel Gallery publication, C. Bishop (Ed.), *Participation*, p.12

³⁰ See Millar's exhibition press release; Appendix A

³¹ Ibid.: "Roland Barthes' book consists of a series of lectures given at the Collège de France in 1978 in which he considers possible embodiments of the Neutral (such as sleep, or silence) or of the anti-Neutral (such as anger, or arrogance). Of particular inspiration for Barthes, was a bottle of ink he bought from the Sennelier shop, and which he spilled upon his return home; the colour was 'Neutral'."

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

blandness reflects on Millar's interest in Minimalism, where 'blankness' might then be more apt: it opens up the work to possibilities, presenting, as it does this, a critique of those such as the Neo-Concretes whose need for greater expression tends towards the smothering of this potential through the more visible presence of the 'author' (especially relevant here through Millar's linking these works to the anecdote from Barthes).

Jeremy Millar, *Neutral (diluted)*, 2007-ongoing
Diluted ink on paper

Preparations, a video-work highlighting the role of chance, was,

...made with the acclaimed pianist John Tilbury 'preparing' the Steinway at his home, in the manner called for by John Cage for his *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946–8). In this preparation, metal screws, bolts, washers, pieces of plastic, and even an eraser, are placed between the strings of the piano, thereby altering the sound of the instrument to something often more akin to a Balinese gamelan.³⁵

35 Ibid.

Jeremy Millar, stills from *Preparations*, 2010

These two further works then specify within this sense of emergence the development of possibility from a 'blank' state, and at the very heart of this, the ingredient of chance.

Millar states, on the film *Preparations*; 'What remains extraordinary... is that such a transformation is made using the most modest of means — Tilbury's collection of screws and bolts look as if grabbed from any shed worktop — and as such might be considered a succinct analogy for the artistic process more generally.'³⁶ Thus this emergence is also not a rarely encountered phenomenon, a moment of deep contemplation, but is aligned, absolutely, as part of the texture of the everyday.

36 Ibid.

2.23 Chance within complexity, developing possibility

These works then find means through ‘simplicity to refer to complexity’³⁷ and it is this overall sense which reflects back to the conception of logic in LeWitt’s statement: there may be nothing mystical, nor our common sense of rational, but instead ‘that which lies beyond the most immediately apparent’ may be a very much more complex state than we might like to, or indeed, may be able to imagine.³⁸

The real significance of LeWitt’s sentence, and also here of a work such as *Mirror of Ink*, becomes clear as implying the conceptual, our sense of ‘mind’, not as something separate from, but something involved in the complexities of experience.³⁹ If read as ‘separate from’ then meaning becomes narrative, and chance, as a fundamental ingredient, is removed. If ‘involved in’ then meaning becomes process, with chance as an essential factor.

This reflects back on earlier points: Mallarmé’s asking, as Bowness puts it, ‘should we not allow for accident in artistic creation?’⁴⁰ appears precisely consistent with a new focus on the external and material. It is this ‘accident’, a distancing from our own narratives, which Manet manipulates in the development of his paintings, forming the sense of ‘dialogue’ that Suchin also describes.

37 Comment in discussion of *Neutral (diluted)*. Millar’s exhibition press release; Appendix A

38 Heisenberg, for instance, suggests that our view of the world by way of Classical science generally functions for our needs, and is, in effect, inescapable, even when contemplating that which we know to be quite different, and more correct; i.e. in Quantum physics. W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.23

39 LeWitt’s use of the term conceptual appears relevant in its philosophical sense; as Conceptualism, positioned, in terms of ideas of universals someway between Realism and Nominalism: ‘Conceptualism with respect to concepts holds that concepts are mental entities, being either immanent in the mind itself as a sort of idea, as constituents of complete thoughts, or somehow dependent on the mind for their existence (perhaps by being possessed by an agent or by being possessible by an agent).’ And, ‘On many views, concepts are things that are “in” the mind, or “part of” the mind, or at least are dependent for their existence on the mind in some sense. Other views deny such claims, holding instead that concepts are mind-independent entities. Conceptualist views are examples of the former, and platonic views are examples of the latter’. See Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *The Classical Theory of Concepts* [Online]

40 A. Bowness, *Modern European Art*, p.153

‘Instead of a man-made selective system operating to predetermined ends, with chance, selection and intent are replaced by the totality of natural possibilities’,⁴¹ as Bill Hare has suggested, commenting on chance in relation to Boyle Family’s procedures.

2.24 Arp, and a further conception of a ‘concrete’ art

As a consideration of a history of ideas, direct connection may also be made here from Millar’s interest in John Cage, and Cage’s acknowledged debt to Hans Arp.⁴² Arp’s own formulation of a concrete art employed chance, as a fundamental aspect of a creative process, paralleling natural processes: ‘we don’t want to reproduce, we want to produce... we want to produce directly and not by way of any intermediary. Since this art doesn’t have the slightest trace of abstraction, we name it: concrete art.’⁴³

Arp’s stands apart from the other formulations so far encountered; the mathematically rational works identified in the tradition connected with Max Bill, the autonomous materiality of Greenberg, the physically expressive and gestural works of groups such as Gutai, or the more psychologically expressive intent of groups such as the Neo-concretes. It accepts the irrational, as chance, but sees this as still subject to a sense of, natural, order: Arp’s concern is with a Law of Chance,⁴⁴ proposing a sense of objectivity, determining the form of the physical world, but which is ‘unfathomable’,⁴⁵ beyond the grasp of our rational comprehension.

41 National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.83

42 E. Robertson, *Arp: Painter, Poet, Sculptor*, p.161

43 Ibid., p.115

44 R. E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, p.137

45 Ibid.

2.3 Consideration in relation to the work of Theo van Doesburg of exhibitions at HICA by Thomson and Craighead (20 June – 25 July, 2010), Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum (18 September – 10 October, 2010), and also including The Great Glen Artists' Airshow (18 and 19 September, 2010)

2.31 A Constructivist relation to science

As author of the *Manifesto for Concrete Art*, the work of Theo van Doesburg is an essential reference point in this study. Here, through reflection jointly on the three shows that comprised the next inclusions in HICA's programme, I wish to bring his ideas into more specific consideration, especially to reflect on identifications so far made and discuss these in light of a relation to science.

Van Doesburg says, for instance, that 'In the future art will be based upon science and technology rather than upon the dream.'⁴⁶ This in many ways seems consistent with Greenberg's observation of moves from the start of modernism toward the factual and away from the fictional;⁴⁷ a state also highly relevant to these three exhibition projects. That is, they still present an intention towards this direction, rather than make appeals solely to the imagination.

It is necessary to consider though how these differing artists might understand and employ science, and what might be drawn as conclusions from their scientific intent.⁴⁸

Art's uncovering of aesthetic laws is understood by the Constructivists as an equivalent operation to science; offering some certainty and universality of meaning as the fundamental grounding of a New art: the new vision of art proposes that 'science and art have the same laws'⁴⁹ or that 'art is, just the same way as science and technology, a method of organisation which applies to the whole of life.' as declared by the International Federation of Constructivists.⁵⁰

46 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.183

47 See section 1.7

48 The following few sections are developed from my MFA thesis, *A Consideration of Theo van Doesburg's Manifesto for Concrete Art*

49 Georges Vantongerloo, in H.L.C. Jaffé, *De Stijl 1917-1931*, p.122

50 Statement By The International Faction of Constructivists, in S. Bann (Ed.) *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.68

Van Doesburg, writing in *G* magazine, says, 'The age of decorative taste is past, the contemporary artist has entirely closed out the past. Scientific, and technological consistency force him to draw conclusions for his own domain...'⁵¹ and Hans Richter further states, 'It is no accident that exact scientific methods exist for all sectors of life.'⁵² They judged science and technology to be at a point where order might prevail over the chaotic world, mastering 'the inscrutable and incomprehensible in life with concepts that are clear, tangible, understandable.'⁵³

It is the confidence provided by this perceived certainty which enables their break with previous forms of art, as with Gan's earlier quoted comment of severance from the art of the Old Believers,⁵⁴ or as explored in Gabo and Pevsner's *Realistic Manifesto* of 1920, for example.⁵⁵ These earlier forms appear murky, a tangle of limited and personal meanings. In the New art the artist's individual activity is given meaning through seeking for what is universally valid.⁵⁶

2.32 Relevance of Plato or Hegel?: the 'real' and the development of 'plastic means'

Plato's Forms, as universals, suggested as constituting the intelligible world and the only true knowledge, separate from the shadows and uncertainty of the lower world⁵⁷ might immediately seem the identification of these universal meanings.

Along with the Constructivists, van Doesburg and De Stijl give the 'universal' fundamental status: from 'the new is connected with the universal' in De Stijl's first manifesto, of 1918,⁵⁸ to 'art is universal' being the first, key, point in the *Manifesto for Concrete Art*, of 1930.⁵⁹ For De Stijl the universal is 'an almost mystical essential force'.⁶⁰ Necessary in their period's realisation of 'a better human

51 *From 'G'*, in Bann S. (ed.) *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.92

52 Ibid., p.94

53 W. Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts*, p.287

54 See section 1.61

55 See S. Bann (Ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, pp.3-11

56 Hans Richter's comment. Ibid., p.96

57 as in the simile of the Divided Line: see section 0.13

58 S. Bann (Ed.), op. cit. p.65

59 Ibid., p.193

60 H.L.C. Jaffé, *De Stijl 1917-1931*, p.114

existence',⁶¹ it offered an 'essential homogeneity of art, life and the universe'.⁶² Indeed, Schoenmaeckers asserts that '...the base of all life, of religion, science and art, is the striving for a clear vision of the universal.'⁶³

Though while Plato features in this discussion, it is Hegel's philosophy and identification of the Universal, a unity of spirit and matter, that is by far the more significant in De Stijl's project. Hegel's,

...complex relation of a universal concept and its manifestation in reality, considers an, overall, combined unity: the reality of nature is as an embodiment of its concept, and there is a necessary reciprocity between the development of this 'concept' and the form of the material world, a joint evolution of ideas and their materialization which form the "objective or absolute spirit".⁶⁴

It is a process of this kind that is basic for De Stijl and van Doesburg: consistently stressing the achieving of a unity or harmony as the result of on-going dialectic processes, the balancing of elements variously discussed as opposites, counterparts, or contrasts.⁶⁵

Van Doesburg's sense of universal and objective meaning develops from his observations of the characteristics of modern painting that I have noted earlier: the flatness of the picture-plane, and innate levels of meaning in materials.

I include here Van Doesburg's own *Graph of the development from perspective illusionism towards the plane (F) and onward to the creation of new realms*, considering its decreasing of virtual depth till a synchrony is achieved with the canvas' surface in modern painting, and developments projected into real space, speculating on what new dimensions might be available to artworks in the future,

61 Ibid., p.62

62 Ibid., p.128

63 Ibid., p.115

64 G. Lucas, MFA thesis: *A Consideration of Theo van Doesburg's Manifesto for Concrete Art*, p.15

65 See J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.77. It should perhaps also be noted that van Doesburg's artistic aims might be said to be in dialogue with Hegel's philosophy, often rejecting aspects of it. He at times also rejects ideas of philosophy altogether. See for example *Aldo Camini: Van Doesburg as an anti-philosopher* Ibid., pp.46-47

noting, as he does, the already fully implicated dimension of time.⁶⁶

Theo van Doesburg, *Graph of the development from perspective illusionism towards the plane (F) and onward to the creation of new realms*, 1929-30

The flattening of the picture-plane again removes the sense of paintings as 'windows in the wall',⁶⁷ and projects out instead into realms that may in future create a unity of art and life, very much in-keeping with his Hegelian concerns. He was greatly influenced by Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*⁶⁸ and especially the sense of 'living within painting' that Kandinsky presents in describing the walls of Russian peasants' cabins 'entirely covered with icons and other paintings',⁶⁹ a sense which Baljeu states as clearly anticipating De Stijl

66 '(F) The realms of space and time, which previously were expressed through illusion only, are now established as a real-plastic manner of expression'. Ibid., p.189

67 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.188

68 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.16

69 Ibid., p.19

interiors.⁷⁰ There is clear divergence in their conclusions though. As earlier noted, Kandinsky affirms an ‘ideal plane’ of understanding, additional to the physical works which very much remain on the picture-plane.⁷¹ The transcendent creates an essential duality of object and meaning. Van Doesburg rejects this duality, and instead aims at unity through expansion into real space, an engagement that explains why, along with interior design (as what would seem an early form of Installation art, i.e. his work at the Aubette restaurant⁷²) architecture also holds such importance for him: for example, his seeking to achieve a ‘synoptical effect’ between painting and architecture, where,

construction and composition, space and time, and statics and dynamics were welded into a unified organism... The plastic expression of space-time painting in the twentieth century enables the artist to realize his grand vision of placing man within painting instead of in front of it. In the final analysis it is only the exterior surface which defines architecture, since man does not live within a construction but within an atmosphere which has been established by the exterior surface.⁷³

Here then, van Doesburg is in accord with the progression laid-out in the previous chapter, of the deliberate objectification of the artwork, to realise something essential in the operations of form and meaning: that these may be judged as synchronous. For van Doesburg this represents the ‘discovery of the power of pure plastic means’⁷⁴ by modern painting, revealing objective and thus universal meanings. These meanings are then equally observed manifestations of a real-world unity, of form and content: the meaning of colour in painting, for example, is a function of this unity, rather than a separable quality.

That this observation of ‘pure plastic means’ may be far from the whole story, as also previously discussed, does not take away from the significance of its realisation; its presentation of a sense of the ‘concrete’ remains central to this study and HICA’s inquiries, as, I suggest, a further “coefficient of art”; something that in its synchrony remains necessary for the establishing of any ‘real’ meaning.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ A transcendent view of meaning, consistent with, for one example, that of Fried’s as described by Foster. See H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.50

⁷² J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.83-87

⁷³ Ibid., p.180

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.120

Theo van Doesburg and Cornelius van Eesteren
Elevations and axonometric drawing of the private house, 1923

2.33 A questioning of the Rational and Intuitive

Camila Sposati’s smoke sculpture, *Yellow Vanishing Points*, may be focused on at this point for how it engaged ideas of science. This piece, a series of yellow military rescue-smokes, placed at selected points on the hillside behind HICA and lit in a particular sequence, was made as Sposati’s contribution to the Great

Glen Artists' Airshow, a collaboration between The Arts Catalyst, a London based organisation which 'commissions contemporary art that experimentally and critically engages with science'⁷⁵ and HICA.⁷⁶

Sposati has stated this work's concern with entropy, investigating the physical processes that constitute the workings of time and space. As a smoke cloud, it presents the chaos and complexity involved, the 'side of nature that the mainstream of physics has passed by, a side... at once fuzzy and detailed, structured and unpredictable.'⁷⁷

Camila Sposati, *Yellow Vanishing Points*, 2010

75 From The Arts Catalyst's website: homepage [Online]

76 As space allows, I will only here consider Sposati's contribution to the Airshow. The Arts Catalyst approached HICA to be the main hosts, and to co-curate the third in their series of Airshows, previous Airshows being held at Farnborough, Hampshire, in 2004, and Gunpowder Park, Essex, in 2007. The Great Glen Artists' Airshow was a two-day event, which The Arts Catalyst proposed as seeking to 'redefine the air as medium' for information and communication, and looking at the 'philosophical territory of the air and the ownership, or the mapping of the spatial landscape' (from The Arts Catalyst, The Great Glen Artists' Airshow: press release). The artists taking part were: Adam Dant, Gair Dunlop, London Fieldworks, Alec Finlay, Susanne Nørregård Nielsen, Esther Polak and Ivar van Bekkum, Camila Sposati, Louise K Wilson and Claudia Zeiske. London Fieldworks (Jo Joelson and Bruce Gilchrist) were in a way part-hosts and instigators of the project through their Outlandia project, near to Fort William, a space for artists' residencies, as an ambitious tree-house structure designed by Malcolm Fraser architects, officially opened on the second day of the event.

77 J. Gleick, *Chaos*, p.3

This work will be further considered in the section on Sposati's solo exhibition at HICA in 2012. Here I would wish to consider the reliance of the work's meaning on Sposati's scientific research, and how her approach to this, as an artist, might reflect on the relation between artistic and scientific knowledge. As an artist and not a scientist it seems highly probable that her understandings may be open to the same criticisms originally aimed at the Constructivists; of being 'dilettante and naïve' copyists of science and technology.⁷⁸ Gabo, responding to this kind of criticism explains that the focus of his art is not 'trying to make a scientific communication',⁷⁹ and Sposati's here seems also clearly not scientific illustration. Instead, Gabo suggests that scientists, 'with all their rational knowledge' are still subject, as we all are, to more intuitive awareness, and it is this that his work engages.⁸⁰ Notably Gabo also sees artists' intuitive responses, this expression of meaning, as reliant on plastic means; scientific knowledge is an essential part of the context, which the artwork and its plastic means are necessarily involved with.⁸¹

In this defence of his position, Gabo implies the rational and the intuitive as two kinds of knowledge, which here might be equally applicable to Sposati's own working between art and science. This may also immediately again call to mind Plato's Divided Line; the clear, certain and rational, separate from the murky, uncertain and intuitive.⁸²

In his later writings, van Doesburg espouses the aim of moving *From Intuition Towards Certitude*,⁸³ and employing mathematical, and, more precisely, arithmetical means in achieving this aim, an aim which again strives for 'the creation of universal forms'.⁸⁴ This aim of certitude would appear very much part of the evidence for what, in exploring an orthodox sense of development from modern to postmodern, might be characterised as Platonism, as 'a hidden controlling structure behind modernist aesthetics', promoted by 'culture's attention

78 C. Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p.104

79 C. H. Waddington, *Behind Appearance*, p.46

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid. pp.46,48

82 Again, see section 0.13

83 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.185

84 Ibid. This point is made while accepting van Doesburg's notable changeability of position. He has elsewhere, for instance, and at around the same time (1929-30), stated that 'De Stijl always has striven for a harmony between the realms of intuition and scientific determination'. Ibid., p.189

to the unchanging abstraction of mathematics'.⁸⁵

But, while noting again that Plato certainly featured in the discussion,⁸⁶ various aspects of van Doesburg's project strongly indicate some other conclusion here. As previously mentioned, his focus remains much closer to Hegel's philosophy, seeming consistent with the sense in his diagram, rejecting a transcendent state in favour of real-world unity. Indeed, throughout his work the stress is unwaveringly on this unity,⁸⁷ and, towards the end of his life, when he becomes more determinedly mathematical in his approach, is maintained through the explicit intention of concrete and not abstract understandings.⁸⁸

2.34 The concrete and non-transcendence: the implying of reasoned empirical knowledge

Rather than the divided picture abstraction creates, the concrete enables a sense of a unified real. That is, if not accepting a notion of transcendence, then both the rational and intuitive are necessarily implied to be more or less consciously reasoned forms of what seems right to call here, empirical knowledge.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ here the example of Thomas McEvilley's comments, in B. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, p.11

⁸⁶ Rotzler, for instance, suggests that both Mondrian's and van Doesburg's 'approach to art was based on a kind of Neo-platonic philosophy', in W. Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts*, p.69

⁸⁷ For example, his comments in J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.141

⁸⁸ I would note a difference here between Jaffé's and Baljeu's accounts of De Stijl and van Doesburg: in Jaffé, Neo-Platonism is variously mentioned in relation to De Stijl, alongside references also to Hegel, though Jaffé, in noting De Stijl's 'opposition to nominalist tendencies...' (H.L.C. Jaffé, *De Stijl 1917-1931*, p.127) possibly reveals a certain bias in his own position. In Baljeu's volume, which contains many of van Doesburg's own writings, there is much discussion of Hegel, and no mention of Plato.

⁸⁹ I would distinguish here between the Empiricism, which Merleau-Ponty points out, still takes the 'objective world as the object of [its] analysis' (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.26), and thus still seeks to determine rational knowledge, and that, which he further explores, which is experiential; the result of our involvement as part of the world. Here his reflections on the Müller-Lyer optical illusion (Ibid., p.6) present a basic divergence of views and starting point for his discussion, expanded on through various chapters considering our 'sense experience' and bodily incarnation, and through this our relation to the world. I will develop this consideration further, i.e. in sections 4.332, 4.34

Our reasoned knowledge, by this, has roots in our basic orientation to the world.

David Summers develops ideas of Meyer Shapiro, and Shapiro's considerations directly of artworks, towards a new sense of "conceptual":

Shapiro does not use the word 'conceptual'... he must have wished to avoid the psychological explanation implicit in the term in favour of an explanation according to which the order of such images is rooted in what he calls "an intuitive sense of the vital values of space, as experienced in the real world." This significance, Shapiro maintained, is "not arbitrary", but is instead "readily understood by the untrained spectator since it rests on the same cues that he responds to in dealing with his everyday visual world".⁹⁰

The example of this kind of awareness, I wish to propose here as the grounding from which more complex understandings are developed. It is the result of our inescapable concrete involvements, suggesting the development of theory from basic practical involvement.

Our 'understanding', formed through individual experiential involvement, thus presents a sense of our own 'plots' (referring again to my reflections on allotments), our own developed responses to the situations we find ourselves within, as the basis of our individual knowledge.

This space of contact between ourselves and the world, emphasising our own roles as agents of change, through our actions and decision-making, presents a feedback process into the overall form of the world. Such a development of individual response (necessarily in dialogue with all others' responses, as part of the environment) suggests knowledge as essentially connected to its temporal setting; enfolded in the process of its own development, further implying its, ultimately, being a part of the same, physical, world. In this light I note again Cage's stating the world as a process,⁹¹ and further noting of consciousness, not

⁹⁰ David Summers, *Real Metaphor*, in N. Bryson, M. A. Holly & K. Moxey (Eds.) *Visual Theory*, p.236

⁹¹ K. Stiles & P. Selz (Eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, p.682

as a thing, but as a process,⁹² which here might suggest an affirmation of our knowledge as the necessary result of our being part of this process's interactions. This point has some clear commonality with Bohm's discussion in *Reality and Knowledge Considered as Process*,⁹³ where he states, '...knowledge too, is a process, an abstraction from the one total flux, which latter is therefore ground both of reality and of knowledge of this reality'⁹⁴ (though I will also later suggest some differences with the process Bohm explores here).

Thus van Doesburg's scientific intent might be proposed as not seeking to follow the scientific discoveries of others, especially as an implied transcendent world of 'rational' meanings, nor an intuitive response that simply has current science as a necessary part of its context, but instead seeks to develop and apply a systematized method to artistic observation of forms and their content, enabled by a new understanding of the unity, and value, of these as 'plastic means': the aim; to employ these in constructing meaning in more certain ways. Writing in 1926, for instance, he declares, 'There are no objective and absolute laws which are independent of that vision which is becoming increasingly profound and variable (and if they were, would lead only to dogmatic sterility). Although there is no fundamental, objective truth, no truth at all, the specific quality of our work, nonetheless has become measurable.'⁹⁵

2.35 A move toward Relational understandings

Sposati made various kinds of judgments in developing her piece; experimenting with locations, scale, quantities, colours and viewpoints. These judgments were clearly informed to a degree by insights from her research, but seem also to always be shifting between these and assessments from areas which might be deemed inaccessible to a purely rational knowledge. If this is the case, then how might Sposati be making these judgments? If a rational stepping-outside and taking-a-measure of a situation is not an option, how might the necessary critical distance be achieved?

92 Ibid.
 93 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, pp.61-82
 94 Ibid., p.63
 95 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.153

Van Doesburg has indicated his sense of colour, as plastic, as potentially having 'mathematical significance', that it may 'evoke all other colours through the power of measure, direction and position.'⁹⁶ Employing this significance as means to develop towards more certitude may logically suggest that knowledge and judgements are developed through a non-transcendent reasoning; the establishing of points in an immanent geometry by way of concrete means, as tool and method of construction.⁹⁷

Critical distance for Sposati is then available through the same mechanisms, something very much more relational; positions and situations judged through relation to others. And this seems to further fit with the relational approach, overt in De Stijl's project, as a system of contraries;⁹⁸ one aspect, a vertical for instance, only being understood as vertical in relation to its contrary horizontal, and so on. It is forms and their relations that are the basis of the dynamic equilibrium, and therefore also the harmony, that is sought.⁹⁹

Indeed, *Complete Concrete* notes the 'intense dialogue' between Mondrian and the Swiss painter Fritz Glarner, from around 1940, with Glarner's terming his Constructivist-Concrete methods as 'Relational Painting'.¹⁰⁰

2.36 The Relational: necessarily, but materially, representational?

The stress on the relational might in part also explain Greenberg's confusion over

96 Ibid., p.185
 97 This, a point I feel van Doesburg to be working around in some of his last writings. His statements, *Elementarism* and *From Intuition Towards Certitude* of 1930, for example, [Ibid., pp.184-186] do direct away from intuitive composition towards more certain construction by way of mathematics. In these, his comments, on the whole, seem to indicate a transcendent mathematics, i.e. 'The method leading to universal form is based upon calculations of measure and number', though this also appears at odds with the intention of Concrete works constructed through the perceived mathematical significance of such elements as colour. If developing this latter view these statements may instead be the beginnings of a differing conception of number, where our 'rational' sense of it is a particular mental understanding discerned from physical origins.
 98 H.L.C. Jaffé, *De Stijl 1917-1931*, p.58
 99 Ibid., p.257: Mondrian's discussion in *The True Value of The Oppositions*, for instance, judging the establishing of a culture of 'pure' relations.
 100 Museum Haus Konstruktiv, *Complete Concrete*, p.345

Mondrian's 'platonising theories'.¹⁰¹ Greenberg is, on the one hand, critical of what he sees as Mondrian taking 'refuge' among the 'Platonic forms of painting – as private at this moment as any dream world',¹⁰² while, on the other, says, 'I am not sure whether Mondrian himself recognised it, but the final intention of his work is to expand painting into the décor of the man-made world...'.¹⁰³ Thus he appears unaware of Mondrian's utopian aim of unity between art and life, something central to Mondrian's, and De Stijl's, project,¹⁰⁴ that does indeed intend this expansion even to the extent of it determining (particularly for Mondrian and Vantongerloo¹⁰⁵) the 'end of art', as art becomes fully dispersed and integrated, through relationships external to the limited form of paintings, into the man-made environment. These comments and views of Greenberg's rather reveal his own focus on the private, the limitations perceived for artworks due to their autonomy.¹⁰⁶ This relational state of artworks presents the possibility that the previously noted difficulty of 'reading-in' to a material form, a conceptual over-layering onto the purely material, may not actually be a problem at all. This conceptualising appears necessary to relational operations, judging one thing in terms of another. Visual simile makes connection and constructs networks of meaning and understanding; an indispensable function, not something to be escaped.

Colin Renfrew's archaeological study, and discussion of the 'materiality of symbols'¹⁰⁷ provides a useful illustration and recent consideration of equivalent conceptualisations here. Van Doesburg's statement that, '...nothing is more concrete, more real than a line, a colour, a surface... A woman, a tree and a cow are concrete only in nature; in painting they are abstract...'¹⁰⁸ asserts plastic means' incompatibility with symbolic operations. Renfrew contends that symbolic

101 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.15.

102 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.73

103 Ibid., p.188

104 See H.L.C. Jaffé, *De Stijl 1917-1931*, pp.128-142

105 Ibid., p.138

106 Of interest here, Beate Reese also notes the relational nature of Albers' works, their interactions of colours for instance, and how this 'reflects his roots in the European art tradition'. Reese further notes the *Neue Konkrete Kunst* exhibition, in Bochum in 1971, and its consideration of American "Non-Relational Art". See *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, pp.280-281

107 C. Renfrew, *Prehistory: Making of the Human Mind*, p.115

108 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.181

relationships develop from our physical understandings of, and engagements with, material reality, such that they imply '... that the concept is not simply an abstract or mentalist rendition of a pre-existing reality. It requires, rather, and involves the discovery or realisation of, a new kind of physical reality.'¹⁰⁹ In this case, the notion that an underlying material reality 'sustains many significant symbols and symbolic relationships is an important one. In defining symbols, we are not just playing with words, but recognising features of the material world with which human individuals come to engage.'¹¹⁰ Thus he warns against a duality, where the notion of 'symbol' is conceived of as 'the mental counterpart of a physical 'reality',¹¹¹ and makes a case for symbols being both rooted in what in this discussion may be termed 'plastic means', and being part of physical reality in-themselves. This may seem to extend Marx's contention, that 'the mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual processes of life',¹¹² to seeing these as developed aspects of the same material life.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev has suggested an "empirical" notion of geometry',¹¹³ which seems very apt in summing-up a sense here of these various relations developed from real-world experience. She adds that this is '...never merely abstract nor rational but is individually perceived and 'mapped-out' in concrete and effective contexts',¹¹⁴ a sense that particularly calls to mind again van Doesburg's major interest in architecture: his is an immersive interest, which indicates this as an equally necessary sense when considering his paintings.

2.37 Reflection on works exhibited at HICA

As stated at the start of this section (2.3), my aim is to bring van Doesburg's ideas into comparison with the artists in the three exhibitions and projects at this point in HICA's programme, especially in regard to their alignments to science. In doing this I suggest there are commonalities of thinking and approach, though wish to also highlight where and how they may diverge. These artists' making clear their

109 Renfrew, op. cit. p.116

110 Ibid., pp.117-118

111 Ibid., p.115

112 N. Stangos (Ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art*, p.162

113 In discussing the work of Luciano Fabro: C. Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, p.42

114 Ibid.

works' reliance on science and technology, places them on something like the trajectory van Doesburg envisaged.

Here then, for consideration, some examples from Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum's, and Thomson and Craighead's works and exhibitions.

2.4 HICA exhibition: Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum

<*AbstractView*>, 18 September – 10 October 2010

2.41 empirical geometry

Our introduction to Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum's work was made by a visiting friend, Henk Jan Bouwmeester, who had worked with Polak in Amsterdam. Polak, it turned out, also knew well Jan van der Ploeg, artist and curator of PS space in Amsterdam. A further connection came from Polak's having met Rob La Frenais, curator with The Arts Catalyst, at the Paralelo, Art, Technology and Environment event in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2009. I had later talked with Rob La Frenais about her work in preliminary discussions on the form of the Great Glen Artists' Airshow, and we were both surprised and delighted to find that we had the same artist in mind, perhaps demonstrating just how small a world it is, but also quite confirming in how right Polak's work appeared for the project.

In mentioning these lines of connection I suggest them as demonstrating a sense of this 'empirical geometry', a sense which is generally present and often explicitly mapped-out in Polak's work (she was one of the first artists to make large-scale art explorations using GPS (Global Positioning System mapping), employing this, for example, in her 2004 *MILK* project, where she used GPS to trace European dairy transportation from a (Latvian) cow to a (Dutch) consumer¹¹⁵).

It was Polak's work with GPS systems that I discussed with Bouwmeester, where, as well as her urban projects, such as building a map of Amsterdam by a number of participants walking its streets carrying GPS transmitters, he had also described her projects working internationally in rural locations and with farmers and farm

115 Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum's exhibition press release; Appendix A

animals, to produce works that, for example, traced, by means of a small home-made robot, lines of sand on the desert floor which reproduced the daily roaming of a nomadic herdsman in Nigeria, or, in a further sand-drawing, the wanderings of cattle on a ranch in Brazil.¹¹⁶

Esther Polak, *Nomadic Milk* project, Nigeria, 2009

On approaching Polak and van Bakkum (Polak has collaborated with Ivar van Bakkum since 2004) there was immediate interest in pursuing a project at HICA where, they decided, the works would visualise processes continually shaping the local environment. A main project was devised, as a collaboration with HICA's neighbour, a sheep-farmer, tracking movements of sheep and sheep-dog through the course of a working day.

Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum, *Cattle Grid*, 2010
Floor projection

116 For details of these projects see E. Polak & I. van Bakkum, website [Online]

Alongside this, the artists experimented with tracking wind currents, using GPS and large balloons, near to the HICA site, and further developed a performance work (later performed as part of the Great Glen Artists' Airshow) where the same balloons would drift across Loch Ruthven (a few minutes' walk, and in view, from HICA).¹¹⁷

Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum, *Loch Drawing Wind*, 2010
performance

In picturing these kinds of relations Polak highlights the significance and concrete nature of moments which might otherwise appear insubstantial. Our inability to observe all these occurrences is suggested as the result of limitations due to our

¹¹⁷ While working at HICA the artists were quite stunned to be photographed by the Google Streetview car as it passed the space (viewable on Google Streetview: *Highland Institute for Contemporary Art*). Reflecting on this remarkable coincidence, given our 'remote' location and the nature of their work, they made a series of pieces manipulating the resulting images, taken from Streetview, and, making a play between the real and the virtual, exploring its methods of placing the viewer 'in' the landscape. They have since also developed the *Urban Fruit Street-Wrapper* project, from further considering this experience, viewable at <http://vimeo.com/polakvanbakkum/urbanfruitstreetwrapper>

occupying a specific location in space and time; our lack of knowledge the result of a practical, rather than philosophical difficulty. That is, (perhaps at odds with van Doesburg's statement denying objective truth, though his comment relates more to a contingent human truth, than to a sense of physical reality), their works do imply some faith in an objective reality, while they, at the same time, explore our sense of necessary distance from this. Their show at HICA may then have been titled *Abstract View* (a title taken from the name of the computer code used in making the works) but, as Polak also quoted (in a talk given at HICA), Yoko Ono's statement, 'draw an imaginary map and follow it down an actual street',¹¹⁸ it is clear they are not suggesting that there is no street, and just the map. Further to this, seems the recognition that their maps are actual in-themselves; they are equally, even as visualizations, reliant on the external and concrete.

2.5 HICA exhibition: Thomson + Craighead, 20 June – 25 July 2010

2.51 A gaining of 'real' perspective?

Thomson and Craighead's works appear in many ways an opposite procedure in regard to the relation between our 'maps' and a sense of objective reality, more engaged with notions of time. By means of demonstrating some more objective sense of this, they expose the arbitrariness of our 'maps', the boundaries we 'rationally' impose to order our experience. This is generally achieved through expanded views of whole networks of connection and relation, rather than a focus on more localised fragments.

Their works, while engaging our sense of time, also provide an especially fitting parallel to concepts of knowledge, such as Plato's Divided Line. The distinction between the light and shadow maintained by a fixed border, or horizon, is revealed, when stepping back to see the bigger picture, to be a localised effect, an illusory structure within a much larger continuum.

¹¹⁸ Lucy Lippard notes Ono's original instructions in full. See L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.178

Thomson + Craighead, *The End*, 2010
Vinyl lettering on glass

This sense, reflecting our everyday experience of celestial order, day and night, is clearly demonstrated in *Horizon*, a work shown as part of the DCA's *Timecode* exhibition,¹¹⁹ of which the artists showed a print at HICA. The piece formed a focus for Alistair Rider's discussion in his text on the exhibition for HICA's 2010 publication, which he titled *Imagine no Horizons*:

... the work consisted of a bank of monitors, with each row displaying the view from various pre-existing webcams, chosen from every time zone around the world. An array of different buildings and landscapes are visible in the foregrounds: a mosque, an airport runway, and so on. But each day, as the earth revolves, the cameras register the light levels at that part of the globe, resulting in waves of daylight and darkness being relayed across the screens. Thomson and Craighead describe it as "an idiosyncratic electronic sundial". Here, however, the sun's progress is recorded at all points around the world, so that every hour of the day is seen in relation to all other views that are being observed across the planet. In this charting of temporality, no one location is singled out. From a viewer's perspective, there are no peripheries and no centre, no seasons, no day, nor night. Instead there is a disorienting, dislocated array of centres, horizons, daytimes and night-times.¹²⁰

119 *Timecode*, Dundee Contemporary Arts, 17 January - 8 March 2009

120 HICA, *Exhibitions 2010*, p.19

Rider, as part of his discussion, also reflects on comments made by Timothy Morton in *The Ecological Thought*; "A place bound by a horizon now seems like a mere patch", Morton affirms.¹²¹

Thomson + Craighead, *Horizon*, 2009
Digital archival print

121 *Ibid.*, p.16

Considering the various ways Thomson and Craighead enable differing perspectives through their work prompts me to consider the definition of perspective, as ‘the apparent relation between visible objects as to position, distance etc.’.¹²² Rather than the illustration of relations, in perspectival painting say, the developing of relational procedures, empirical geometries, between things in the world, affords perspective in better assessing ‘position, distance etc.’. The opposite of reverse perspective employed in religious icons, which is understood to intend to make the world of the icon appear more ‘real’, ‘ontologically larger’ than the world of the viewer, thus diminishing the viewer’s world and its importance,¹²³ this inversion of pictorial structure appears available as a sense of perspective in art, as real, rather than illustrated, relations. It is, importantly, perspective gained through the relation of ‘plastic’ elements (these works are engaged with visually, they are not solely rational explanations. There is awareness that, in the case of *Horizon* for example, the work is constituted by CCTV cameras from around the globe.)

Allan Kaprow has described an imagined example of a cave painting of a bison, having immediate material relations to its surroundings and the revelatory moment of this becoming a ‘picture’, conceptually separated from its context, through the addition of a horizon line beneath it.¹²⁴ In comparison to this example it does not seem to me that Thomson and Craighead’s aim is to enact a return to the state of the cave painting, by technologically erasing the horizon line, something that might suggest, as Picasso is reported to have said on seeing the caves at Lascaux, that ‘we have discovered nothing’.¹²⁵

The trajectory from the start of modernism, as described by van Doesburg, and his comments also suggesting this momentum as being maintained in connection with developing science, seems to indicate that some further, equivalent operation is perhaps currently underway, which instead enables a much expanded view

¹²² J. Pearsall & B. Trumble (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, p.1084

¹²³ R. Beck, *Notes on the Theology of Icons Part 4: Reverse Perspective* [Online]

¹²⁴ A. Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, pp.155-156: ‘Painting had become symbol rather than power, i.e. something which stood for experience rather than acting directly upon it’.

¹²⁵ Quoted, for instance, in D. Whitehouse, *Science shows cave art developed early* [Online]

and understanding, and, modifying another of Plato’s analogies, presents the cave-dweller instead as staggering out from the shadows into the light of the sun, to find that the sun is just an average star in, practically, an infinite number of stars.¹²⁶

The reassuring imposition of an horizon, some handle on the chaos that preceded, is shown to be as useless now as a handle attached to nothing: the next step perhaps in assessing our relational understandings is considering that our relational means, the horizontal and vertical of De Stijl works, for instance, may only really be understandable as such within particular environments, such as the Earth’s gravitational field; within our own, human, frameworks of understanding.

2.6 A reflection on the similarities and differences of approach between these artists’ works, and Van Doesburg’s: concrete rules, plastic means, ‘chance’ and efforts toward a science of art-making

From these examples I wish to consider some observations:

Firstly, regarding their relational operations: the limitations of a particular environment appear to enable some foothold, some purchase to be gained on otherwise impenetrable complexity. In this, it seems to me, these artworks may operate something like simple games and puzzles that rely on direct and ‘concrete’ rules, developing between particular objects or forms, and their relations within their environments: noughts and crosses, solitaire, draughts, might be some of the simplest examples.

These artworks, in these ways, appear to construct relational points through plastic means, to suggest or infer from these some further point or points, whether this be some new perspective, some fresh insight, the next possible move in the game, or so on. In this, they are a significant step away from the intuitive, requiring some rationale for each element, a step indicative of a ‘factual’ rather than ‘fictional’ employment. They appear, from this, formally comparable to the systems (implying process), of those such as the GRAV artists, ‘reducing art to

¹²⁶ See Plato’s *Simile of the Cave*, in *The Republic*, pp.278-282

rational and geometric elements and random procedures',¹²⁷ or even to Max Bill's 'logical method', where 'every part of the creative process corresponds step by step to logical operations and their logical checking'.¹²⁸

The 'neutral' scientific and experimental presentation of these is in order to see materials as plastic means, equivalent to the pieces in these games, which are not given any other significance which may interfere with their 'moves' within the particular setting or environment.

Though their interpretations of the intentions and results are quite different, both Greenberg and Krauss are equally opposed to the seeing of narrative where there is none, or where the point is expressly to defeat narrative readings. Greenberg discusses painting as the 'victim of literature', for instance,¹²⁹ and Krauss is variously critical of a 'picture theory of art',¹³⁰ that would understand Malevich, for example, as a painter of icons and 'Mondrian as making pictures of theosophical diagrams or esoteric emblemata or constellations'.¹³¹ Both Greenberg and Krauss instead consider artists' seeking to disrupt or escape these literal interpretations, to force a material encounter with what may then be said to have become plastic means, whether this may be sculptural materials, paint and canvas, text, music, sound, and so on. While the back-to-basics approaches of International Constructivism or the Elementarism of van Doesburg reduce elements to the simplest, perhaps as equivalent to the simple games mentioned above (aiming to develop some universal certainties, as the rules of these games may also be deemed universal), it seems that any form, no matter how ephemeral or complex, may become plastic means, if viewed in the necessary, non-narrative, way.

Though here there also seems a notable divergence: in these few exhibitions there did not appear any particular drive toward the development of plastic elements in the way van Doesburg's scientific intent may have foreseen. That is, while an 'objective', scientific and experimental stance remains key to focussing on the relations within the works, the project of developing a science from the most basic

127 W. Grasskamp, *Hans Haacke*, p.31

128 E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.27

129 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1*, p.28

130 See, for example, R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.238

131 Ibid.

constituents of graphic marks and colours appears, here at least, put to one side. These artworks remain distinct from the work of scientists or engineers, or from the less utilitarian but still 'constructed' intentions of van Doesburg and De Stijl.

Significantly, connected to this positioning, the artists under consideration here, in, in each case, considering some wider sense of physical nature rather than the solely human, enable room for chance to enter into the processes of making. As part of this, though some reference to De Stijl and Constructivist traditions was made here and there, such as in the colours of balloons and smoke used by Polak, van Bakkum, and Sposati, there otherwise appeared a purposeful inquiry into what might constitute plastic means, through the artists' employing of such things as the internet, GPS, smoke and so on; engaging the ethereal and ephemeral, to encounter head-on, and test out, the potentialities of chance and the random, and to consider how this affects a sense of the material.

Alistair Rider, for instance, in his essay on Thomson and Craighead's exhibition makes a comparison between his, prior, virtual, experience and, later, actual experience of HICA's location, describing his checking Google Maps before making his trip to the gallery. He then reflects that Thomson and Craighead's works often aim 'to materialize the internet in the space of the gallery'.¹³² From this, he considers the possible equal 'reality' that these two experiences may hold: the two kinds of experiences may be separate more on a level of scale, than of order. Superficially, these may seem different involvements, more and less tangible, but perhaps this is, in actuality, more a question of physical magnitude (of our physical surroundings compared to electric signals, light and generated graphics) than of ontological nature.

Bourriaud has similarly reflected that 'In a way, an object is every bit as immaterial as a phone call',¹³³ which equally implies the converse, in the context of his discussion of Relational artists engaging materiality and moving away from 'Process Art and Conceptual Art, which, for their part, tended to fetishize the mental process to the detriment of the object'.¹³⁴ In the light of these few exhibitions, and our general sense of the project at HICA, it seems clear that Bourriaud's observation of a Relational Aesthetics, stands as only one aspect of a wider, current, inquiry into

132 HICA, *Exhibitions 2010*, p.15

133 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.47

134 Ibid.

the nature of materiality, that incorporates the 'inter-human' he identifies.

Emphasising the materiality of the ephemeral indicates both that this level of materiality may be available to the 'plastic', as elements in artworks, and, as with the earlier examples of Richard Couzins' works (and their relation also to the work of John Cage), that we are immersed within this at all times, and in all ways.

Van Doesburg's sense of development in his own works *From Nature towards Composition*,¹³⁵ and from composition, to counter-composition, and then to construction, presents his desired progress from intuition to greater certitude, and a more reasoned production.¹³⁶ To summarise here: the rationales involved in employing plastic elements in these few shows perhaps reflect positions on a related scale; they could perhaps be judged as in some way between composition and construction. While many procedures seem here in common, and are employed toward a sense of more reasoned production, consistent with their concerns with science and technology, a very different focus appears as an inquiry into materiality itself (and thus of the plastic elements they employ), largely inquiring beyond the constructed human world and toward a sense of objective reality in nature, to consider and incorporate perceived aspects of this, such as chance. It seems that some radically different conception of relations between plastic means, that might be revealed by these further material inquiries, would be required before anything resembling van Doesburg's science of art-making might be re-engaged, if, as this seems equally questioned, this is a desirable thing anyway.

2.7 Theo van Doesburg's *Manifesto for Concrete Art*

In this assessment, it feels correct here to also reflect directly on van Doesburg's *Manifesto for Concrete Art*, of 1930, which may enable some further relevant conclusions to be drawn.

The manifesto forms a brief opening section to the first, and only, edition of *Art Concret*.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.151

¹³⁶ See also *From Intuition Towards Certitude*, Ibid., p.185

¹³⁷ van Doesburg died in 1931

Theo van Doesburg, Otto Carlsund, Jean Hélion,
Léon Tutundjian, Marcel Wantz (eds.),
Art Concret no.1, 1930

The text of the manifesto reads:¹³⁸

- 1: Art is universal.
- 2: The work of art must be entirely conceived and formed by the mind before its execution. It must receive nothing from nature's given forms, or from sensuality, or sentimentality. We wish to exclude lyricism, dramaticism, symbolism, etc.
- 3: The picture must be entirely constructed from purely plastic elements, that is, planes and colours. A pictorial element has no other meaning than "itself" and thus the picture has no other meaning than "itself".
- 4: The construction of the picture, as well as its elements, must be simple and visually controllable.
- 5: Technique must be mechanical, that is, exact, anti-impressionistic.
- 6: Effort for absolute clarity.

¹³⁸ as translated in S. Bann (Ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.193

It seems significant that the manifesto was published in the year identified by Greenberg as the moment of decline for Cubism. Stephen Bann notes that the manifesto's focus on painting 'tacitly admits that the Constructive program is no longer applicable',¹³⁹ presenting a dramatic lowering of ambition from its earlier embodiment of, for example, 'the determination of the artist and the theorist to pursue the implications of a marriage between art and social revolution'.¹⁴⁰

I would question this. Its focus on painting returns me instead to the schema in van Doesburg's *Graph of the development from perspective illusionism*, also of 1929-30, and to the reasons why this trajectory was identified through painting and not other media. Van Doesburg's intention is still very much a unity of art and life. Art Concret also expresses, more strongly than ever, the identification between art and the development of science, where the 'creative spirit becomes concrete', through 'intellectual means'.¹⁴¹ In this light the manifesto, by focussing again on painting, is aiming to refocus and reinvigorate the continuing trajectory.

Theo van Doesburg, *Arithmetic Composition*, 1929-30

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- 139 Ibid.
 140 Ibid., p.4
 141 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.181

2.71 a structure of oppositions: in works and methods; between Realism and Nominalism

Here I will also briefly consider related points made separately by Rosalind Krauss that may present developments, through drawing a parallel between van Doesburg's work and Krauss' discussions of Pollock's and, primarily, LeWitt's works.

Reflecting on Mondrian's paintings in *Reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly*,¹⁴² Krauss observes that Mondrian's aim is to paint the operations of Hegel's dialectic, to 'make a work about Nothing', which 'Nothing' Krauss understands as an Hegelian 'all Being';¹⁴³ Mondrian's 'dicta about "dynamic equilibrium" translate into the grand condition of his subject, another term for Becoming'.¹⁴⁴ The structures of oppositions he employs to do this are 'not unlike that described by the first account of structural linguistics, in which meaning is understood as a pure function of oppositions...'.¹⁴⁵ And, she adds, 'The great Pollocks, like the great Mondrians, operate through a structure of oppositions... the subject that then emerges is the provisional unity of the identity of opposites: as line becomes colour, contour becomes field, and matter becomes light. Pollock characterized this as "energy and motion made visible"...'.¹⁴⁶

Van Doesburg's manifesto may be judged in this light as an attempt also to formulate some equivalent procedure, where, for example, between the universality of its first point and a picture's meaning just 'itself' in the third point, the contradictory and relational strategies of De Stijl works opens up its sense, indicating an overall aim of a unity of general and particular.

In *LeWitt in Progress*,¹⁴⁷ Krauss reflects on Suzi Gablik's book *Progress in Art*, which 'views the entire range of the world's visual culture as a problem in cognitive development'.¹⁴⁸ She summarises Gablik's outlining of a historical

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- 142 R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, pp.237-238
 143 Ibid.
 144 Ibid.
 145 Ibid.
 146 Ibid., p.239
 147 Ibid., pp.245-258
 148 Ibid., p.248

development of works as falling ‘into three distinct periods, the first consisting of all visual representation prior to the discovery of systematic perspective, the second, beginning with the Renaissance, defined by the mastery of perspective, and the third, that of modernism, heralded by the onset of abstraction’.¹⁴⁹ Gablik’s conclusion, as Krauss describes, gives an account of what an abstract art would truly be:

the modern period (beginning with Cubism) cognitively outdistances the Renaissance by withdrawing [the] power of coordination from the world entirely. In so doing it demonstrates the independence of all deductive or logical systems from the process of observation. In Gablik’s view the achievement of abstract art is its freedom from the demands of perceptual reality...¹⁵⁰

Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project No.1 (ABCD)*, 1966

While Krauss notes others’ views also in relation to LeWitt, identifying his work with a “rationalistic, deterministic abstract art”¹⁵¹ and “the pursuit of intelligibility by mathematical means”,¹⁵² her criticism of these interpretations leads to an opposite identification. She instead sees LeWitt’s subversiveness, his work’s ‘addressing

149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 She quotes Donald Kuspit, Ibid., p.245
152 Ibid., p.246

itself to the purposelessness of purpose, to the spinning gears of a machine disconnected from reason.’¹⁵³ She notes Robert Smithson’s observations linking LeWitt with “‘concepts’ of paradox” and the contradictory, concepts as “prisons devoid of reason”,¹⁵⁴ and LeWitt’s own statements, such as, “irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically”.¹⁵⁵ From these she discerns ‘the opposite of Idealism’; an ‘absurd Nominalism.’¹⁵⁶

As earlier considered, van Doesburg’s concerns with science, and especially mathematics and arithmetic, may present an even closer-to-call moment of opposite identifications. Museum Haus Konstruktiv for instance, in very recent discussion of van Doesburg’s manifesto present it as ‘unambiguous’,¹⁵⁷ and ‘clearly defined rules’¹⁵⁸ which, coupled with their view of Concrete and Constructivist art as ‘logical and rational’¹⁵⁹ implies a reading which is as problematic as that of the interpreters of LeWitt that Krauss mentions.

Reflecting, for example, on Krauss’ highlighting of Suzi Gablik’s ‘abstract’ conclusions, indicates van Doesburg’s concerns with the exact opposite; that of a concrete art, where, in reverse of Gablik’s observation, it is precisely the power of coordination that the world affords, which is of concern.

But here also similarities and differences of interest between LeWitt and van Doesburg may be considered. LeWitt’s nominalism may be seen as in-tune with that of others at the time, explicitly with Flavin for instance,¹⁶⁰ or implied in the ‘specific objects’ of Judd, and Morris’s phenomenological encounterings, as a reaction against the understanding of a prior prevalence of a Neo-Platonic modernism.

It seems something of van Doesburg’s Hegelian bent which leads him to anticipate this action and reaction though, through the presence of both universalising and

153 Ibid., p.255
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid., p.256
157 Museum Haus Konstruktiv, *Complete Concrete*, p.343
158 Ibid., p.12
159 Ibid., p.342
160 See Michael Govan’s discussion of Flavin’s works such as *Nominal Three*, in M. Govan, *Irony and Light*, in *Dan Flavin: a Retrospective*, p.37-40

particularising statements in his manifesto. There is something here that makes sense of, alongside Constructivism, his deep involvement with Dada, which included such things as having a Dadaist alter-ego, as the poet I.K. Bonset,¹⁶¹ organising and hosting Dada matinees, working closely with figures such as Arp and Schwitters and maintaining a close correspondence between the Dadaists and De Stijl in general.¹⁶² This, a mystery, a dirty secret, for those who might judge his works as solely 'logical and rational', maintains absolutely, throughout his practice, the structure of oppositions Krauss notes in regard to Mondrian, as intending towards the realisation of an Hegelian 'Nothing'.¹⁶³

2.72 Possible interpretations of LeWitt's positioning

In this comparison Krauss' clearer identification of LeWitt's nominalism appears more problematic. It would, in this way, rule out the operation of the structure of oppositions that she identifies with Mondrian and Pollock, for example.

But one wonders if this is also entirely correct. LeWitt's highlighting of the importance of engaging mind¹⁶⁴ seems to be presenting his works as equally open, in some way, to these differing interpretations. Again it might be noted that philosophically Conceptualism is some way between Nominalism and Realism; judging concepts as mental entities, and thus having some real existence, while not judging them to have real existence independent of the mind, as with Platonic universals.¹⁶⁵

In this way his works appear actually more focussed on mind than van Doesburg's, whose sense of 'spirit' (which, with his Hegelian concerns suggests the German 'geist', more commonly translated as spirit, but generally taken as somehow between spirit and mind¹⁶⁶) allied to his 'concrete' concerns, is perhaps more physically oriented and manifested. (Van Doesburg also underlines that his 'spiritual' is 'entirely different from that which it represented for our predecessors or, until this very day, for witches, fortune-tellers and Theosophists'.¹⁶⁷)

In combination with this, LeWitt's stress on the intuitive nature of his art and ideas¹⁶⁸ appears a regressive step, denying the potential for more reasoned practice, and, while a reaction to rationality, conversely appears to reinforce a picture again of a divided line between the rational and intuitive.

Portrait of I.K. Bonset (Nelly van Doesburg in disguise), c.1927

161 See J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.38-39, for instance.

162 Ibid., pp.53-55 has details of these Dada involvements.

163 It is interesting that C. H. Waddington also records the appeal of Dada for Mondrian, noting his friendship with Dada artists in his early life and that 'according to a perhaps prejudiced witness it is true [Tristan Tzara], Mondrian stated, that of all the types of modern painters other than his own it was the Dada-Surrealist movement that appealed to him most.' C. H. Waddington, *Behind Appearance*, p.40

164 C. Harrison, & P. Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, p.836

165 See earlier note, 39, in section 2.23

166 See Michael Inwood's introduction, to G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, p.xiii

167 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.154

168 C. Harrison, & P. Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, p.834

2.73 Oppositions and a need for 'activity': works' concrete effects as part of lived processes

My aim here is to draw out further concerns that may reflect on the shows at this point in HICA's programme. I would suggest that from their perspective LeWitt's retreat into intuition and, if Krauss is correct, sacrificing of the potential a structure of oppositions may be seen to generate, its dynamic equilibrium, its, again in Pollocks words, "energy and motion made visible"...', might be criticised precisely for a lack of purpose.

That is, his 'purposelessness of purpose' may have been an appropriate position at the time in his particular context, but from a wider perspective may be seen to be the manifestation of a sense of malaise.

Opposite to this, a state of 'activity' appears to characterise the intentions of modern art, developed through its various means. It provides the 'why' for modernisms whole trajectory.¹⁶⁹

The effect of this 'active' appears also a dialectic process; an 'is it/isn't it?' question posed by the work prompts a response, a resolution, in some knock-on effect in the real space and lives of the viewers.

The 'passive' opposite appears as objection in critiquing works. Bourriaud has suggested the opposition of activity to passivity is 'perhaps the dominant opposition of Twentieth Century art'.¹⁷⁰ Bishop also includes quotes from Guy Debord arguing that activity is the means to combat the spectacle, our weapon against '... the empire of modern passivity',¹⁷¹ though she adds cautionary notes,

¹⁶⁹ 'activity' appears widely understood, and applied, as basic to modern and contemporary artistic intentions: For instance, Jon Thompson has stated, 'the idea that works of art are not passive things; that they involve an active, nowadays we might say an inter-active principle; that they are invested with the power to change the way we think about and relate to the world, remains the most generally accepted article of faith in the Modernist credo' (J. Thompson (1991), *Deadly Prescription*, p.60), and, as earlier noted, it is also the first concern Claire Bishop states within the methodology of contemporary participatory practices (see section 2.22).

¹⁷⁰ An observation made by Bourriaud during his talk *On Filliou*, discussing the work of Robert Filliou, at The Henry Moore Institute, on 19 June 2013.

¹⁷¹ in C. Bishop (Ed.), *Participation*, p.12.

referring to Rancière's comments that 'active' and 'passive' are,

riddled with presuppositions about looking and knowing, watching and acting, appearance and reality. This is because the binary active/passive always ends up dividing a population into those with capacity on one side, and those with incapacity on the other.¹⁷²

By this 'passive' reckoning though, perspective paintings, for example, appear in some inevitable way prone and penetrable by the gaze of the viewer; their form, essentially decorative, reinforcing a morbid view of artworks and their potential.

Whether, referring back to the Marises pursuit of fidelity, 'activity' actually ever leads to any conclusion may well be beside the point. It is the maintaining of the activity that, though having its tragic aspect, of never being able to capture the quarry, remains necessary for artworks: the desire of artists, by this, is to lead an 'active' and engaged life.¹⁷³

LeWitt's 'spinning gears', if this is, in truth, the conclusion of his work, disconnect him from this activity. Though his works are more pointed than Krauss suggests, and are thus also indicative of activity that he might otherwise wish to deny; finding means to engage other kinds of purpose. Foster notes, for instance, Donald Judd's perhaps unintended move from a Greenbergian criteria of 'quality' to an avant-gardist position of 'interest', in his *Minimalism*: 'Whereas quality is judged by reference to the standards not only of the old masters but of the great moderns, interest is provoked through the testing of aesthetic categories and the transgressing of set forms.'¹⁷⁴ Here it seems the mining of this same vein of interest may present LeWitt's own 'activity', even if it takes a contrary form.

The works in these three shows considered here, in their intentions and in their procedures, clearly maintain a sense of their artworks' activity. They do this, crucially, through engaging, questioning and investigating our sense of materiality, and in their methods employ means reliant on an approach in-keeping

¹⁷² Ibid., p.16

¹⁷³ The opposite malaise may also again be illustrated by way of Greenberg's discussion in *The Decline of Cubism*, J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, pp.212-214

¹⁷⁴ H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.46

with a constructed and relational reasoning, as variously noted, presenting open questions for the viewer to engage with and make their own sense of.

Thomson + Craighead, still from
The Time Machine in Alphabetical Order, 2010

Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum,
Wall Drawing Wind, 2010
C-prints, 26.6 x 40cm

But, a further point of in some way close similarity, though still apparent divergence from van Doesburg: their investigations of materiality, while necessarily taking-on apparently paradoxical aspects, such as considerations of the general and particular, make no overt effort to formulise these into artistic statements of, in Krauss' terms, an Hegelian 'Nothing'. That is, while working with a sense of artworks and their means as just 'themselves', these are consistently directed towards apparent ends, which, in this respect, emphasise their activity; where they do have an eye on their media being at least in part their message, and thus do approach something like this 'Nothing', this appears only obliquely, in the forming of the works' 'active' sense.

2.8 HICA exhibition: Boyle Family: *Loch Ruthven* 24 October – 28 November 2010

2.81 A summary of points in relation to Boyle Family's works

Bill Hare, in his essay for National Galleries of Scotland's 2003 Boyle Family exhibition catalogue, notes various points regarding Boyle Family's works, which place them interestingly within this dialogue, at this point. Here his comments focus on Boyle Family's 'paintings', as he explains Boyle Family call their resin, fibreglass and 'mixed media' studies.¹⁷⁵

While perhaps immediately apparent as an investigation of materiality, he notes more particular aspects of their 'painterly' procedures, especially relevant to the various characteristics of works so far discussed.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Bill Hare in National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.81

¹⁷⁶ Although their practice seems immediately concrete-related, in approaching Boyle Family for the exhibition we were not aware of any direct connection. Their early works appear to show some influence of Daniel Spoerri, and we were aware of his involvement with Concrete Poetry and collaboration with others, such as Emmett Williams, important in this area. (See for example, E. Williams (Ed.), *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, p.vi.) Discussions with Boyle Family did reveal some direct connection to Concrete Poetry, through contact with Ian Hamilton Finlay and a close correspondence with the poet and Benedictine monk, Dom Sylvester Houédard.

For instance, he reflects that Boyle Family present ‘non-semantic’ worlds, works with no ‘symbolic mediation acting as either bridge or a barrier’.¹⁷⁷ They achieve a certain autonomy and uniqueness, by this, but at the same time are ‘open and accessible’. (This, as Hare also notes, places them as opposite to Greenberg’s sense of autonomy.¹⁷⁸) Their works are equally also, he states, paradoxical, in the sense of being both realistic and perfect.¹⁷⁹

For Boyle Family, he suggests, beauty and perfection lie in the supreme individuality of the thing itself, not in some abstract system of aesthetic order.¹⁸⁰ Theirs is an ‘empirical art’ which ‘reifies the appearance of the world to the onlooker, not as a culturally constructed image, but as a perfectly authentic fact.’¹⁸¹ I would qualify this comment to an extent: while Hare considers each work a ‘unique event’, they are also clearly inextricably tied, both through the ‘global’ nature of Boyle Family’s projects, and, thematically, through the juxtaposing of random patches of the Earth’s surface, to a sense of inquiry at least into the universal.

Boyle Family, *Study from the New Town Series with Concrete Gutter and Embedded Stones*, 1988

177 Bill Hare in National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.83
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.

2.82 The concrete and Nature: the possibility of ‘chance’,
and an acceptance of complexity

Alongside some notable commonalities of approach here then, there are also very clear differences between theirs and van Doesburg’s Concrete Art. Here, again, these point to some wider consideration of materiality and nature, where van Doesburg’s is in strict opposition to nature, and by this concerned with the human spirit, a difference that will be variously considered further.

‘Boyle Family’s ultra-descriptive painting achieves its own kind of independence, not by denying the realities of the world of which it is part, but by embracing them’... they ‘eschew the selective idealism of classicism and the self-referential purity of modernism’.¹⁸²

It is this embracing of the ‘realities of the world’ which leads to

...another paradoxical dimension to Boyle Family’s work, where beauty of perfection is not based on some Pythagorean system of mathematical order and control, but on an open and receptive creative process that incorporates the risky, but crucial role of chance.¹⁸³

Though, Hare further notes, while they open their creative process to chance, ‘accident is completely eliminated and each work attains a perfect ‘rightness’ about it, which no amount of conscious intent could achieve.’¹⁸⁴ In this they are, he quotes, “frighteningly exact”.¹⁸⁵

As Arp demonstrates, this openness to chance and focus on processes of nature are certainly part of the discussion at the outset of a Concrete Art, and these intentions seem more in sympathy here. Though in comparison the results in Arp’s ‘human concretions’¹⁸⁶ are limited in their scope and vision, focussing as they do on a sense ‘drawn out by an artist aware of forces of unconscious inspiration’¹⁸⁷ which guides the creation of sculptural form with figurative connotations, reflecting

182 Ibid.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid., p.84
186 A. Bowness, *Modern European Art*, p.186
187 Ibid.

his conviction that we are 'conditioned to read any object, however abstract, as relating to ourselves'.¹⁸⁸

These concerns of Arp's are still worthy of note here, particularly as example of the melting-pot of ideas between Dada and Constructivism at the time: his dialogue and collaborations with van Doesburg for instance,¹⁸⁹ as well as Arp's and van Doesburg's connections and friendship with Schwitters (Schwitters being a significant influence in Boyle Family's developing works, especially their early assemblages¹⁹⁰).

Boyle Family's works stop short of constructing an actual science from their observations and experiments, though they develop a vast conception in their empirical geometry, between the various sites of their *World Series* project, for example, and the investigations at each site such as '...taking film, sound and smell recordings, collecting air, water, insect and plant life...'¹⁹¹ making studies of '...movements of people in the nearest populated area...'¹⁹² and focussing down in some of these analyses to microscopic levels.¹⁹³

These works appear then to take up the challenge of the immense complexity of meaning observed when works establish their three and four dimensional status, their implicating of various temporal and cultural contexts. In doing so Boyle Family's project to fix and consider every detail of random sites becomes as absurd and illogical as any of LeWitt's, or perhaps comparable in this way also to van Doesburg's, seeing in his attempts at constructing a science of art-making that 'everything is measurable'.

188 Ibid.

189 The sections *Mecano and other Dada activities*, and *The Aubette, Strasbourg, 1926-8*, in J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.53-55 and pp.83-87, respectively, indicate these.

190 Patrick Elliott in National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.10

191 Ibid., p.15

192 Ibid.

193 Ibid., p.18

2.83 Engagement with given conditions: involvement in the zeitgeist

In some important way, in developing and following through their projects, Boyle Family appear the product of the state that Greenberg describes in *The New Sculpture*; the three dimensional works springing from cubist painting and collage, which he suggests have a great advantage over painting precisely through their lack of tradition: painting is handicapped by its past. This new sculptural practice '...endows it with a virginity that compels the artists' boldness and invites him to tell everything without fear of censorship by tradition.'¹⁹⁴ Boyle Family are free to explore their involvement in the world they find themselves inhabiting, its given state, and develop their practice through examining this with intense scrutiny.¹⁹⁵

This again may be seen to build from a position of intuition: their works not illustrations of theories, but developing, and constructing their knowledge through observation and experiment.¹⁹⁶

What is of particular interest for HICA and this study, is that this focus has enabled their ploughing their own furrow; they continue in their works today, for example, as artists, not ignorant of, but operating seemingly unperturbed by the currents around them, of the High- and Post- modern.

Here, it is first and foremost the work itself which sustains and informs the practice; in making judgements of direction, of what does and does not appeal. That is, their critical awareness appears to be developed from within the dialogue with their subject rather than from, necessarily, any external knowledge, theory or expertise. Perhaps a required state for the production of un-blinkered, non-academic work, it suggests an equivalent schema of theory and practice to that of rational and intuitive knowledge, earlier considered and questioned: proposed by my general

194 J. O'Brian (Ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2*, p.318

195 It is relevant here (a point I also later reflect on), that it is noted as basic to Spinoza's philosophy that 'using his natural powers of reasoning, a free person, free from superstitions and illusions, can work out for himself what is the necessary framework of human knowledge'; Stuart Hampshire's comment in his introduction to B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.viii

196 Sol LeWitt comments for instance that in works where the idea becomes the machine that makes the art, the '...art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive...' C. Harrison & P. Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, p.834

argument to be not of separate orders, but ends of a spectrum of reasoning, which also appears more complexly intertwined than just a straightforward sliding scale.

This state further provides explanation for the back to basics approaches of those involved with the New art, from the elementary forms of Constructivism, for example, to the interest in childlike or 'primitive' states through the history of Modern art, which certainly the countercultural mix of drugs and music in Boyle Family's milieu in the 1960s would seem a continuing aspect of.¹⁹⁷

These points combined reflect, as David Harding has described, Boyle Family's being particularly 'immersed' in their work.¹⁹⁸ Harding's discussion indicates this immersion as Boyle Family's deep involvement in the spirit of the time, the 1960s,¹⁹⁹ and this, as the zeitgeist, seems a highly pertinent prompt to a consideration in relation to Hegel,²⁰⁰ where their experimental progressions would appear to provide a sense of developing dialectic. Perhaps a true, that is, unselfconscious, involvement in such a process requires a genuine state of 'immersion', residing closer to the intuitive and practical than the rational and theoretical? Harding includes a quote from a speech of Margaret Thatcher's: 'if you can see a bandwagon you've missed it'.²⁰¹

2.84 A structure of oppositions as manifested in the presence of the author

Being aware of this sense around their work we had also wondered more than with any other show how their presence might manifest in the space of an exhibition. One primary concern of the exhibitions at HICA was to question the nature of presence of the 'authorial hand', the relation of exhibited works to an extended sense of the artist's personality.

197 See for example Andrew Wilson's descriptions in National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.55

198 In HICA, *Exhibitions 2010*, p.33

199 Ibid.

200 'Even in matters of individual creativity a person is enveloped in the spirit of his time (what Hegel called the Zeitgeist...)' B. Magee, *The Story of Philosophy*, p.159

201 D. Harding in HICA, *Exhibitions 2010*, p.33

Here we would reflect on Hegel's observation that,

...the natural shape of the human body is such a sensuous concrete as is capable of representing spirit, which is concrete in itself, and of displaying itself in conformity therewith. Therefore we ought to abandon the idea that it is a mere matter of accident that an actual phenomenon of the external world is chosen to furnish a shape thus conformable to truth. Art does not appropriate this form either because it simply finds it existing or because there is no other. The concrete content itself involves the element of the external and actual, we may say indeed of sensible manifestation.²⁰²

It seems here that authorial input may be a further contrary feature, explicitly explored in works that may be said to have some concrete intent: attempts are made to see the artwork solely as it is, or to acknowledge that authorial influence is inescapable, no matter how separate the artwork may be contrived to be: the early examples of Moholy-Nagy or methods suggested by some of the Dadaists,²⁰³ making works by way of phone-calls to those who would carry out their manufacture, on the one hand, and the general awareness of artworks as concretizations, necessarily implicating something of their context, including the presence of their author, on the other. This would suggest that while artworks can be viewed simply as neutral objects, there are also always the vestiges at least of this imprint, of the artist's own 'shape...conformable to truth', perceptible throughout their production (in the same way as Tzara's poems are said to resemble their author²⁰⁴)

202 G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, p.76

203 In 1922, Moholy-Nagy had 'vividly demonstrated the Constructivists' repudiation of subjectivity' by dictating two paintings, Em1 and Em2, over the telephone to a professional sign-writer, 'using a colour-chart and a piece of graph paper' (see T. Benson (Ed.), *Central European Avant-Gardes: exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930*, p.181). Eric Robertson also notes Arp, Tzara and Walter Serner's essay in the 1920 Dada Almanac, which suggests, 'Painting was treated as a functional task and the good painter was recognised for instance, by the fact that he ordered his works from a carpenter, giving his specifications on the phone'. It is of further interest here that Robertson describes this procedure as 'pictorial nominalism', and suggests that, from this, it is just a short step to the 'inscrutable, anonymous' works of the post-war American Minimalists. E. Robertson, *Arp: Painter, Poet, Sculptor*, p.36

204 I reflect on Tzara's poems and their relation to Duchamp's artistic procedures, as discussed by Rosalind Krauss, in the next chapter, section 3.54

This indeed is our observation from running HICA; that all works can be viewed in this same way: as simultaneously entirely separate things, and embodying in some way authorial presence. These aspects seem concurrent in the work, and one eye can be closed to either at any time, though these are usually combined in the same way that sight of both eyes, at the same time, creates normal vision. (A sense of this state has, from the start, influenced a variety of aspects in the set-up of HICA. For example, in the way that the gallery's Concrete concerns run alongside exhibitions: both can be seen entirely separately or together in parallel.)

Both these aspects are also clearly and simultaneously explored in the work of Boyle Family, where they acknowledge the 'observer effect' to the extent that even 'the act of looking at and recording the site - may have an influence upon it and thus also become a part of the work',²⁰⁵ at the same time as they express a desire for objectivity to the extent that, as Mark Boyle is quoted as saying, 'I have tried to cut out of my work any hint of originality, style, superimposed design, wit, elegance, or significance.'²⁰⁶

This also clearly chimes in again with earlier observations of artists' employing 'structures of oppositions' in seeking to realise the operations of Hegel's dialectic, such as Krauss' comments on Mondrian and Pollock.

The further sense from the contradictory positions taken here by Boyle Family suggests that to remove entirely the experience of an artwork as a 'window' is perhaps a fallacy, equal with my earlier comments regarding the relational procedures in De Stijl works. An attuned sense of this conceptualising may again enable the important ability to switch from one to the other, to see the 'window', or just the object, or distinguish both in parallel: this also appears necessary to relational operations, in judging one thing in terms of another. It creates, not a 'transcendent' window, but a side-by-side comparison enabling perspective. In this way a major focus of Boyle Family's works appears the demonstration that we can never see the presence of the particular because our universalising 'conceptual' intervenes, and we can never see the universal, due to the effects of seeing it from a particular point. Somehow through the actions of these two combined we navigate the world.

²⁰⁵ Boyle Family/Construction, press release for Boyle Family, *Barcelona Site* exhibition [Online]

²⁰⁶ Patrick Elliott in National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.14

2.85 Boyle Family's installation: the HICA space and view: a reflection on windows...

Working through several approaches for the show, Boyle Family, in the end, followed a development of their 1964 performance *Street*,²⁰⁷ which the space offered immediate potential for, having the very large window looking out over the surrounding landscape. The show appeared quite different to *Street* though, in that *Street* was a performance of very limited duration, where this was an exhibition over a period of five weeks. Along with other significant differences, for example, no curtain to draw back, no rows of chairs for the audience, no passers-by to observe, only things on a much bigger or smaller scale; birds and insects, or hills and clouds – the effect was to focus much more on the gallery space than the view out of the window. And, observing visitors to the exhibition, it did very much throw into question their motivations; how and why they came to be in the space, how they then acted within it and responded to it, what they wanted from it, the view acting in many ways more as a mirror than a window.²⁰⁸

Boyle Family, *Loch Ruthven*, installation view, 2010

²⁰⁷ See National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.47: 'With *Street*, the audience was led down Pottery Lane, a west London street, to the back entrance of a building marked "Theatre". They made their way into a room where chairs faced some curtains. When these opened, the audience found that they were looking out through a shop window to the street, and whatever happened there was the event.'

²⁰⁸ Here a prompt again to Krauss' considerations in her essay, *Grids*. R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, pp.9-22

Street worked through the ordinariness of the view. This project negated the obvious appeal of the view from HICA, and, rather than observing people in the street as actors in some drama of everyday life, visitors, by being placed suddenly and awkwardly in relation to a more spectacular landscape, and a, perhaps inherently, more theatrical location, were instead made very much aware of their own presence within the drama. In this examining of self-consciousness the show perhaps had more in common with Boyle Family's performance *Any Play or No Play*, of 1965, where Mark Boyle invited the stalls audience in a London theatre onto the stage, and announced to the audience in the balcony and upper circle that they were then watching the stalls audiences' performance.²⁰⁹

Boyle Family, Loch Ruthven
Installation views, 2010

²⁰⁹ See National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.14

This operation, as noted in the discussion of Jeremy Millar's exhibition, opens up the artwork to the viewer's speculation. Viewers are enabled to be part of the work's process, its 'unforeseen development'. As Bill Hare also comments, 'any transformation that does take place in front of a Boyle Family painting does not occur in the subject itself, but in the attention and attitude of the onlooker.'²¹⁰

What seems very close to the intention of Jeremy Millar's *Mirror of Ink*, earlier noted, is the consideration this switch from window to mirror promotes: this conceptual window is not made available as opportunity for comparison to some other, but as frame for our own subjectivity. This shift of perspective, a more pointed relational exercise, finds another way to scrutinise the way the 'realities of the world' are formed, through highlighting our own part in creating its real-space organisation; the positions we variously occupy; how we constitute a part of the world, behaviourally, physically.

2.86 ...and our presence in the drama

Boyle Family's project at HICA engaged the whole gallery space as no other exhibition has. This reveals something of the scale of their thinking, consistent with what is evident elsewhere in their projects, which, 'manifest a desire to consider the significance of all parts of the physical environment... from the global to the microscopic', especially apparent in works such as the 'overwhelmingly grand' *World Series* project.²¹¹

(That, as O'Doherty notes 'whole gallery gestures came in a rush at the end of the '60s and continued sporadically through the '70s',²¹² a period that also saw the development of artistic strategies such as 'institutional critique',²¹³ perhaps again reveals an enabled sense of purchase on the complexities of context at this time, something which had previously appeared, since the move to four dimensional states, through cubism and constructivism, too daunting to take on. (The 'impossible complexity and ephemerality of contextual and temporal meanings' I note in section 1.61, for example.))

²¹⁰ Ibid., p.87

²¹¹ See Boyle Family exhibition press release; Appendix A

²¹² B. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, p.100

²¹³ See for instance H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.59

Here the viewer's attention does not seem drawn only to the physical world, or their own presence as part of this, but also towards a wider theatre in which we also unavoidably participate. That is, not just the positions we occupy, our culture and ideologies, and that which forms them, but also a sense of that which permits their formation, which may have some parallel in De Stijl's term 'beelding', a sense of overall creative shaping, a 'suprarational... alogical and inexplicable' sense, '...the equilibrium from within and without, what was achieved in a creative struggle with ourselves... All arts, acoustic or optic are rooted in one and the same concept...' ²¹⁴

The difference Bourriaud points out between the intention of Relational artists and that of Joseph Beuys comes to mind here. Beuys' social sculpture is a much more conscious participation, reliant on a new spiritual awareness of every contributing member of society, and directing towards desired aims of democracy and socialism. ²¹⁵ In marked contrast, for most of the artists Bourriaud describes there is '...no preordained idea about what would happen: art is made in the gallery, the same way that Tristan Tzara thought that "thought is made in the mouth"'. ²¹⁶

This is the difference then of truly opening a work to chance. In this reflection, more than artists' purposeful ideological interventions, works are inevitably and unavoidably 'ideological acts' ²¹⁷ in which the side-effects of our individual and subconscious actions may be brought to the fore, as well as any completely random factors, as they might occur. Bill Hare's comment again: 'Instead of a man-made selective system operating to predetermined ends, with chance, selection and intent are replaced by the totality of natural possibilities.' ²¹⁸

214 W. Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts*, p.69. Rotzler connects this discussion of the term Beelding with comments suggesting 'a kind of Neo-Platonic philosophy' that Mondrian and van Doesburg based their approaches on.

215 C. Bishop (Ed.) *Participation*, p.125

216 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.40

217 Foster's terming of this again, H. Foster, *Between Modernism and the Media*, in *Recodings*, p.56

218 National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.83

2.87 A process of nature, and our active involvement; an 'altering of life-space'

If much in this chapter refers to Hegel's dialectic in connection to the work of van Doesburg, and may be related also to van Doesburg's involvements with International Constructivism and thus also to the Constructivist basis in historical materialism, ²¹⁹ then here again by Boyle Family, as well as by the other artists showing at HICA, discussed in this chapter, the operations of wider nature, with chance as part of this, are stressed as basic in the materiality from which the 'social, political and intellectual processes of life' ²²⁰ may then ultimately be determined.

A final observation here links back to my consideration at the start of this chapter then, of possibilities for arts' interventions into processes of change, as a more active involvement than our being just passive subjects of natural processes. Here our part in forming the order we perceive, is not suggested as determined by any 'rational' progression or direction that might imply 'ends', as with the example of Beuys, just given, but instead notes the 'irrationality' and 'randomness' of this process, its openness to, and involvement with 'chance'.

Haroldo de Campos' poem *Cristal Forma*, included in HICA's 2011 exhibition of concrete poetry from Brazil and Scotland, which I will discuss as part of the next chapter, contains the phrase, 'the hunger of form', in its contemplation of processes of coalescence. ²²¹ This has struck me as particularly illuminating in relation to what I suggest here as the chaotic development of more ordered structures, and in relation to Darwin's intention of the phrase 'the survival of the fittest' (a phrase he rather ill-advisedly adopted from Herbert Spencer's inversion of Malthus ²²²).

219 See for instance C. Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p.94: 'according to their programme the Constructivists' only ideological foundation was "scientific communism, based on the theory of historical materialism"', or Gan's discussion of constructivism and its direct relation to historical materialism in *Constructivism* (1922), in S. Bann (Ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, pp.40-41

220 N. Stangos (Ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art* p.162

221 de Campos describes his poem as 'An essay of poetic crystallography. The metaphorical hunger of form and form as a kind of hunger. Crystal as the ideogram of the process', in E. Williams, *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (publication is arranged alphabetically by author: no page numbers given.)

222 'Spencer turned Malthus upside down by making his theory the basis of a theory of human progress based on the elimination of the "unfit"', from J. W. Burrow's discussion in his Introduction to C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p.33

‘Fittest’ in Darwin’s usage implies that which fits best: “‘fit’ in [Darwin’s] sense always related to a given environment, not to an absolute scale of perfection’.²²³ Here, in the light of consideration of wider processes of formation, this ‘hunger’ suggests a two-way process, a speculative agency on the part of the form, its ‘fit’ the result of a symbiotic relation between forms and their environment.

De Campos’ forms’ ‘hunger’ further calls to mind the phenomena of what are known as ‘upward streamers’ in lightning strikes; small channels developed in the electric fields of objects on the ground that appear as diminutive and speculatively emitted forks of lightning from points closest to the thundercloud, to be met by any one, also of a number, of much larger, downward ‘leaders’ from the cloud. It is the meeting of these two that creates the channel for the formation of the lightning bolt.²²⁴

This process of, rather than ‘sending out feelers’, as might be said, but (forms) instead emitting streamers, to possibly be met by, environmental, leaders, is a useful analogy here, in describing this symbiotic process. In the case of lightning at least, this is a recognised physical phenomenon, there is nothing ‘psychic’ about it. And it again proposes something in line with, but more active than Ezra Pound’s statement, ‘the artist is the antenna of the race’,²²⁵ regarding which

223 Ibid.

224 ‘Ionized channels, the conductors for lighting discharge, are referred to as leaders as they travel outward from the original charge concentration and are invisible to the naked eye. The positively and negatively charged leaders proceed in opposite directions, positive upwards within the cloud, the negative towards the earth...’

... ‘When a stepped leader approaches the ground, the presence of opposite charges on the ground enhances the strength of the electric field. The electric field is strongest on grounded objects whose tops are closest to the base of the thundercloud, such as trees and tall buildings. If the electric field is strong enough, a positively charged ionic channel, called a positive or upward streamer, can develop from these points.’ ... ‘As negatively charged leaders approach, increasing the localized electric field strength, grounded objects already experiencing corona discharge exceed a threshold and form upward streamers. Once any downward leader connects to any upward leader available, a process referred to as “attachment”, a circuit is formed and discharge may occur. Photographs have been taken on which unattached streamers are clearly visible. The unattached downward leaders are also visible in branched lightning, none of which are connected to the earth, although it may appear they are.’ See *Lightning* [Online]

225 Quoted in Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, p.190

Lygia Pape has written, ‘artists can sense something that is nascent in the air, emerging, invading, and altering life-space... He is the gratuitous antenna of world transformations...’.²²⁶

Physics determines exactly where the lightning will strike, but the factors this ultimately relies on are so minute as to appear, from our perspective, an operation of chance. And perhaps also in nature there is something truly indeterminate at work.

Here then a proposal, in a continuing reference to Hegel, that in this, the streamer might be considered as equivalent to his positing of ‘concrete content’,²²⁷ an order of content with potential for ‘particularity and phenomenal manifestation’,²²⁸ making itself available to the possibility of being met by Heraclitean thunderbolts,²²⁹ forging the real, not as isolated events, but as constant and all-pervading process.

The power of artworks is then to stand as lasting (in human terms) presences in this kind of process, maintaining, as Greenberg’s earlier comment²³⁰ suggests, the transformation of the space they exist within. If, for van Doesburg, ‘painting is a means through which thought is expressed in a visual manner’, and ‘every painting is a colour-thought’²³¹ then creative intellect²³² emanates from the image and shapes the world; this is its ‘atmosphere’.²³³ The concrete intention may thus also be after the fact of conceiving and creating the artwork itself, its real involvements, part of its and the world’s continuing ‘unforeseen development’. Van Doesburg’s focus throughout on the spiritual reflects his sense that specifically human will may be judged as active in this; that it may determine things, or that in some local and limited way at least, as the title of Psychic TV’s album suggests, it may *Force the Hand of Chance*.²³⁴

226 Ibid., p.191

227 G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, pp.76-77

228 Ibid., p.77

229 See for instance D. W. Graham, *Heraclitus*, [Online]

230 See section 2.1

231 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.182

232 Ibid., p.181

233 Ibid., p.180 ‘...man does not live within a construction but within an atmosphere which has been established by the exterior surface.’

234 Psychic TV’s *Message From the Temple* is included on the album *Force the Hand of Chance*.

3 Concrete Vernacular

3.1 Reflection on the previous, and introduction to this chapter: reconsidering order and rationality; our subject/object relations

In the previous chapter I focussed on a sense of process, important for the meaning of artworks, in continuing the direction toward an engagement of the 'real'. The characteristics of modernist artworks, the flattening of the picture-plane and focus on materials, logically develop an engagement of real space and time, and thus a sense of process, with meaning, in some way, necessarily reliant on this. Significantly, 'chance' appears as a basic ingredient in this engagement, in the ongoing subjective interpretation of works; the logical extension of this process in the artworks' temporal development; artworks' ongoing 'concretisation' in their knock-on effects in the space of viewers' lives; the enabling of audiences' and artists' 'active' interventions within the artworks and their processes, and thus artists' new, developed, awareness of working with a sense of potential of a 'totality' of natural possibilities. These effects reflect on the relation of rationality and irrationality; in artworks, and in their further implications regarding the location of meaning, our sense of knowledge, and of science.

To further develop this discussion, this chapter primarily reflects on the apparent order (and thus again, rationality) formed within this more chaotic process. Given such an apparently random and uncertain developing process, operating monistically, that is to say, self-organising, free from transcendent laws, how may order still appear? I consider the implications of physical space, its all-pervasiveness presenting universality, and the potential from this for understanding the 'local' generation of form: space's being particular at all points, developing complexity from its basic and physical nature.

This reflection necessarily also incorporates our own, human, relation to this nature, our being necessary and equal parts of its process, but experiencing a separation. Here I explore positions, such as van Doesburg's, stating this separation as an opposition to nature and materiality, while maintaining that this is also a contradictory, overall, unity. The question is then presented as still, I propose, an ongoing dilemma, of which should form the focus of our concerns,

which forms the ground of meaning for artworks? This fresh perspective on questions of (human) rationality in relation to (natural) irrationality, begins an exploration of the mechanisms and manner of our own integration: our 'composite' form as part of other 'composite' forms, and from this, an investigation into the nature of 'form' in general, to be explored in the next chapter.

3.2 HICA exhibition: Richard Roth: *Vernacular Modernism* 1 May – 5 June 2011

3.21 The development of *Vernacular Modernism*: a dialogue between the local and universal

SNO's (Sydney Non-Objective's) catalogue (mentioned in section 1.23), notes the space's positioning through its name. SNO, it suggests, harks back to an earlier era of earnest, provincial, art societies, adding a note of historical concern into SNO's activities¹ (the space is not just focussed on the 'current'), while also highlighting those that run the space's awareness of this as also part of a 'burdened, modernist dialectic of internationalism/provincialism.'²

Richard Roth had shown at SNO, in 2009,³ and we were aware of his work within the same network of artists as contributed to our exhibition exchange with PS. It was in describing his work to us, discussing his years of collecting various kinds of objects, and curating these collections, alongside, and for some periods instead of his production of Minimalist object-paintings, that he used the term 'vernacular modernism'.⁴ This particular focus for his collections he suggests expands 'on Minimalist ideology',⁵ and extends a 'sense of reverence for ordinary objects and everyday culture'. The 'objects develop the often blunt and vulgar language of things, a language constructed by narratives around objects that are in continual flux.'⁶

1 See Carolyn Barnes' essay in Sydney Non Objective, *SNO Catalogue: 2005-2010* (the catalogue does not include page numbers)

2 Ibid.

3 SNO 54, 7th – 29th November, 2009

4 R. Roth (2009), Personal e-mail to the author. The term was developed from Roth's own lecture and presentation, *Collecting Myself*, [Online]

5 See Roth's exhibition press release; Appendix A

6 Ibid.

The term ‘vernacular modernism’ chimed in perfectly with a sense we wished to explore, and became title for Roth’s show, as well as providing our own title developed from this, of *Concrete Vernacular*, under which to consider the four exhibitions we hosted through 2011. Playing-off of this sense of modernist dialectic the phrase, for us, specifically explores a sense of the local rather than universal generation of forms, suggesting forms as the result of local conditions rather than transcendent laws.

Roth’s exhibition was one installation, comprised of separate displays of objects from his collections. Our press release for the exhibition stated the collections as investigations of ‘curatorial methodologies in contemporary art, where displayed objects may become artworks in their own right.’⁷ In the case of this exhibition the collections were of eye-shadow compacts, house-paint colour-charts and eight-inch by ten-inch business forms:

...each collection becomes an examination of cultural values, and while they are presented as neutrally as possible, Roth’s exhibiting them suggests his choices and inclusions as both self-portrait and reflection of his own cultural landscape. Artists are then, he maintains, necessarily curators of their own unique museums of oddities and ephemera: considering what catches their eye, questioning the values this attention reveals.⁸

The effect of these various ingredients, especially as allied to the show’s title, clearly prompted questions of the universality of meanings within elements of the selected objects; the colour-charts local ‘colouring’ through the addition of evocative labels, for instance, greatly exaggerated by their context in the exhibition. These and other presentational details of the charts emphasised their appealing to particular markets, to the desires and aspirations of their intended consumers, revealing the importance of a colour’s conceptualisation over and above its material presentation. Through this presentation the objects, as indexes, indicated something of the cultural positions of their end users (an action comparable in some ways to Polak’s GPS mappings).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

This comparison of objects from very different locations (primarily from around the US and UK), naturally prompted ‘dialogue between geographical areas and local understandings’.⁹ ‘In the context of a now globalised contemporary art it [aligned] this vernacular “language of things” with the universal language desired by Modernism, allowing space to reflect on the difference between these, and insight into both local and global value.’¹⁰

3.22 Roth’s Minimalist positioning: Nominalist or Realist?

Roth’s alignment with Minimalism suggests a Nominalist, rather than Realist, sympathy; subjective phenomenological experience is understood to form meaning, rather than anything transcendent; there is a bottom-up, rather than top-down production.

Contextual concerns appear a natural corollary of such an alignment, as with Hal Foster’s discussion of Minimalist development;

In this way the object of critical investigation becomes less the essence of a medium than “the social effect (function) of a work” and, more importantly, the intent of artistic intervention becomes less to secure a transcendental conviction in art than to undertake an immanent testing of its discursive rules and institutional regulations.¹¹

This function though appears almost as a side effect of the intentions of those originating Minimalism. Foster also, for example, describes the originating direction in Judd’s works as an ‘excessive devotion’ to some of Greenberg’s considerations, such as the content of painting’s relation to frame edges, to break away from two-dimensional space and into real space: ‘Judd reads the putatively Greenbergian call for an objective painting so literally as to exceed painting altogether in the creation of objects.’¹²

Previously noting Greenberg’s presenting in very positive terms of the similar

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.58

12 Ibid., p.44

development out from the picture-plane, from cubist collage to a ‘new sculpture’, a Constructive sculptural development that Morris is understood to see his work as in some way resuming,¹³ questions Foster’s reading of this as such a radical break in-itself. The particular significance in this Minimalist development is more the shift from relational aspects being within the resulting three-dimensional work, to being without; the works themselves are desired to exhibit ‘wholeness, singleness and indivisibility’, in Judd’s terms, as ‘Specific Objects’¹⁴

It is this step into the three-dimensional that leads again to the observation that these objects ‘necessarily exist in time’.¹⁵ Thus the Minimalists’ is a repeat in some ways of the original Cubist and Constructivist engagement of the temporal and contextual, though, in this, and despite this appearing somewhat unintentional and coincidental, they are perhaps more ready to accept and take on its implications.

I have, in earlier discussing the Symbolists’ first encountering of material engagements, described their glimpsing of forms in their ‘objecthood’, as their seeing these as solely material, without the content provided by conceptual readings. For Fried this experience, through developments since the Symbolists, now represents the art itself.¹⁶ His use of the term ‘objecthood’ designates instead a state of equality with ordinary objects,¹⁷ which is inseparable from our temporal world and therefore also with its meanings. These can never escape our conceptions of them to achieve the state he describes as ‘presentness’.¹⁸

Fried’s complaint against Minimalist works then is that in becoming simply objects they also reinstate literal readings through their object’s operating in time, obscuring the purely plastic. For Fried, theirs is a flawed attempt at achieving presentness, and it seems to a degree also for the Minimalists, as they also intend for works to be grasped wholly as ‘shape’,¹⁹ or, in Morris’ terms as a gestalt, ‘the gestalt simply is the “constant, known shape.” And shape itself is, in his system,

¹³ Fried’s comment in *Art and Objecthood*, C. Harrison & P. Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, p.823

¹⁴ Ibid., Here I continue to follow the useful, if contentious, discussion in Fried’s criticism of Minimalist forms in *Art and Objecthood*

¹⁵ Ibid., p.832

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.822-832

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. See especially p.832

¹⁹ Ibid., p.823

“the most important sculptural value”.²⁰

This Minimalist aim toward whole, single and indivisible, specific objects, presents again a moment of taking literally, and exceeding, Greenberg. A novel extension to Greenberg’s material concerns, it again presents a material experience (that of shape) which may only be momentarily glimpsed before it too is submerged within its attendant contextual implications. Fried, at the end of his text, suggests that this is almost inevitably the case as ‘we are all literalists most or all of our lives. Presentness is grace’.²¹

I reflect on these concerns here to show firstly that Roth’s exploring of a ‘language of things’, though he may be coming from a Minimalist standpoint, makes no noticeable attempt to present or examine his objects as ‘specific’, but is focussed instead on the purposeful engagement of their surrounding discourse. In Colin Glen’s description, his objects do simply remain as such, being brought only temporarily into the parentheses of art.²²

Richard Roth, *Vernacular Modernism: Colour Chart*

A second point is that Foster, surprisingly, writing in the mid-1990s, still appears to maintain this same original aim and procedure of the Minimalists to an extent,

²⁰ Ibid., pp.823-824

²¹ Ibid., p.832

²² HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.12

and thus their version also of Greenberg, by considering that through their employing seriality (perhaps once and for all!) art may be severed from what he suggests may be its last transcendental order, of artistic subjectivity, as well as from representation: '...minimalism rids art of the anthropomorphic and the representational not through anti-illusionist ideology so much as through serial production.'²³ By this, Foster still appears to desire some radical break, here to a nominalist 'presentness'; he is still, as these others are, striving for another world of, purer, meaning.

In contrast Glen notes Roth's acceptance of representation.²⁴ His work's seriality, the unavoidable result of being collections, contains representation here and there within it, and also as a surrounding sense: a necessary aspect of contextual involvements. The grids of Roth's business forms, for example, the ubiquity of their horizontals and verticals, are as Mondrian's paintings are; immediately non-representational in one sense, and ultimately representational in another.²⁵

Richard Roth, *Vernacular Modernism: Business Forms*

²³ H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.63

²⁴ HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.12

²⁵ Again Krauss' essay *Grids* is highly relevant here; her discussion of grids as 'fully, even cheerfully schizophrenic' in these ways. R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.18

And this indicates the significance of his exhibition's title, and the point at which the sense of this develops, moving from an arbitrary sense of contextual construction of meaning, the 'continual flux' of these objects' vernacular, to encountering something more fundamental. His seriality reveals something distinctly more modern in flavour through its juxtapositions; some common-ground, and an awareness of what look like universal meanings. The points at which this occurs here direct towards the consideration of the physical necessities of Nature, as the most basic determinant, from which all else develops; such things as the material and scale of the objects: for example; why A4 size; why paper; why plastic compacts of the size and shape they are; why these designs; why these colours?

Richard Roth, *Vernacular Modernism: Colour Chart*

Richard Roth, *Vernacular Modernism: Compacts*

3.23 Things' conformity with their place in nature: active forms within an active background

The form of an object is, after all, as D'Arcy Thomson considers, a "diagram of forces":²⁶ Roth's presentation suggests the human requirements for their use as part of the 'environmental pressures' that Thomson considers alongside inter-molecular cohesion, friction and gravity,²⁷ as an equal feature of the laws of physics, which 'set the ultimate rules' and to which, 'there can be no exceptions'.²⁸

Forms thus develop in 'conformity with their place in nature', their 'field of action and reaction in the Universe'.²⁹ This absolutely localised process is fundamentally reliant on the background nature of, all-pervasive, space. Peter Stevens, building from work such as Thomson's, begins from consideration of space as no longer 'a passive background like a set of coordinates' but instead 'a real agent that gives rise to all the rest of the material world. It is the primeval stuff from which all else springs'.³⁰ Any change in its nature would result in 'very different forms' being produced.³¹

This then provides a sense of immanent universals, from which the individual forms we perceive are developed. Space's all-pervading nature is 'particular' at all points. The forms we perceive are direct and necessary expressions of its universality.

This observation of 'conformity' gives scientific back-up to a sense such as Hegel's, that 'we ought to abandon the idea that it is a mere matter of accident that an actual phenomenon of the external world is chosen to furnish a shape thus conformable to truth',³² something which may previously have seemed speculation of the order of phrenology.³³ And Hegel's 'truth' here may in

26 W. D'Arcy Thomson, *On Growth and Form*, p.11

27 Ibid., p.12

28 Ibid. In John Tyler Bonner's introduction, p.xxii

29 Ibid., p.17

30 P. S. Stevens, *Patterns in Nature*, p.6

31 Ibid.

32 G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, p.77

33 Here I refer to Hegel's discussion of phrenology and physiognomy, under the heading *Observation of the relation of self-consciousness to its immediate actuality*, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp.185 – 210. In his

turn illuminate how van Doesburg comes to see painting, a concrete exploration of form, as also 'an intellectual search for the truth by means of a visual culture'.³⁴ By being involved in the external and actual, paintings are equally direct manifestations of this objective reality. At the same time this provides explanation for his sense of artworks as simultaneously universal, and having no meaning other than themselves.

Van Doesburg elaborates on his sense of plastic meaning in discussing his Elementarism stating, 'Due to the increasing need for an understanding of reality... the independence of matter becomes increasingly important... Each colour – as pigmentation or as matter – possesses an independent energy, an elementary force'.³⁵

This 'increasing need' then, the reason for the appearance of these concerns in his and others' work in the early Twentieth Century, is our rapidly developing understanding of physical reality and our place within it; a new awareness of the 'independence of matter'. We are no longer sole operators within an otherwise inert universe, something like the passive background Stevens describes, but are embedded in a world of things with their own energies and force; materials and forms with significance in-themselves.

3.24 Spatial organisation

Equally identifying elements in artworks' fundamental connection to the values of space, but developing instead from the perspective of their cultural origins, David Summers' ideas on our relations to the spaces that artworks organise and constitute are also very relevant here. He expands on comments made by Meyer Schapiro, suggesting that our "intuitive sense of the vital values of space,

introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, J.N. Findlay describes this attempt by Hegel to 'physicalize consciousness' as 'repulsively long' (Ibid., p.xix), suggesting that 'all that is important in Hegel's long attempt to make dialectical sense of these primitive exercises is the final outcome: that if self-consciousness can be reduced to something like a bone or a bone-structure, then a bone or a bone-structure must be credited with all the intentional negativity, and the negation of this negativity, involved in self-consciousness... if mind can be modelled by matter, matter must be possessed of every intricate modality of mind.'

34 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.181

35 Ibid., p.160

as experienced in the real world”³⁶ is significant in the interpretation of images. Summers considers how this significance may not be arbitrary or conventional, but physically determined.³⁷

Notably, in relation to Roth’s exhibition, the spatial organisation Summers identifies is discerned through consideration of ‘culturally distinct’ artefacts.³⁸ Through this he assesses Schapiro’s argument that the spatial order within images is more than a code. It can be explained by

...the fact that people everywhere are normally upright, oriented, handed, of a certain size, and by the further fact of the significance we find in and give to the simple physical conditions of our existence’... ‘The explanation of this non-conventionality is based in the experience of the conditions of our own embodiment.’³⁹

The artefacts Summers considers may seem at some distance from Roth’s concerns; an Olmec hand axe, standing stones in Nigeria, a bronze plaque from Benin and so on, but the significant conclusion he reaches, that ‘conceptual’ images are both rooted in this physicality, and are interpretable through its consideration,⁴⁰ appears very much in agreement with Roth’s.

Roth’s presentation is not of objects seeking distance from their conceptual interpretation. On the contrary they wish to fully acknowledge and engage this as part of an appreciation of what these things are, in their objecthood. But from this also springs the realisation that they are, before anything else, manifestations of a basic physicality, and that further to this their ‘conceptual’ nature is itself grounded, absolutely, in this same physicality. Their perhaps more arbitrary subsequent interpretations are rooted in the inherent, and through being viewed in this way, through a focus on this relation, they may be understood to be within art’s parentheses.

36 In *Real Metaphor*, in N. Bryson, M. A. Holly, & K. Moxey (Eds.), *Visual Theory*, p.236

37 Ibid., p.237

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p.251

3.3 HICA exhibition: *Grow Together: Concrete Poetry in Brazil and Scotland*

3 July – 7 August 2011

(Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos, Décio Pignatari, Edwin Morgan, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Geraldo de Barros)

3.31 Origins of a ‘concrete’ poetry

Excerpt from *Manifesto II*, De Stijl vol.III, 6, April 1920: *Literature*.⁴¹

in order to construct verbally the multiplicity of events

around and within us

it is necessary to re-establish the word

according to both its SOUND and its MEANING

since in previous poetry

by means of the predominance of associative and

subjective sentiments

the intrinsic significance of the word was destroyed

we wish to grant with all the means at our disposal

syntax

prosody

typography

arithmetic

orthography

a new significance to the word and new power to the expression

the dualism between prose and poetry cannot survive

the dualism between content and form cannot survive

for the modern writer form will therefore possess an immediate

spiritual significance

he will not describe an event

he will not DESCRIBE at all

instead he will WRITE

through the word he will re-create events in their interrelation

a constructive unity of content and form

Theo van Doesburg/Piet Mondrian/Anthony Kok

41 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.111-112

I begin this section with this excerpt from De Stijl's *Manifesto II*, from 1920, as example of the breadth of activities, from say Apollinaire's Calligrammes to Schwitter's collages, with all manner of visual poetry between, that might be said to have been working towards a concrete poetry in the early Twentieth Century, and as example of how clear and well-formed this intention at times seemed.⁴²

It was not until 1955/1956 that Augusto de Campos produced his statement first identifying a concrete poetry,⁴³ building on these substantial foundations, along with other influences, later noted as including Mallarmé, Pound, Joyce, and Cummings in poetry and literature, Webern, Boulez and Stockhausen in concrete and electronic music, with mention also of Bill, Albers and 'concrete art in general'.⁴⁴ Williams states the term concrete poetry was agreed between the Noigandres poets of São Paulo and Eugen Gomringer in 1956⁴⁵ through their preceding dialogue, at the time when Gomringer, the 'acknowledged father of Concrete poetry'⁴⁶ was producing his own 'constellation' works.⁴⁷ (All were still in their Twenties.)

This communication between the Noigandres poets (Augusto and his brother Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari) in São Paulo, and Gomringer, highlights the direct constructivist and concrete nature of this dialogue, with the Noigandres poets close connections to the Ruptura group in São Paulo,⁴⁸ for instance, and Gomringer's involvements at The Hochschule für Gestaltung, at Ulm.⁴⁹

The Noigandres' *Pilot-Plan for Concrete Poetry*, of 1958, also notes Dada as

42 Emmett Williams provides a useful, very brief sketch of the diverse origins of concrete poetry in his introduction to E. Williams (Ed.), *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, pp.v-vii

43 J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, pp.78,219

44 Ibid., p.90

45 ...and that they were all unaware that Öyvind Fahlström had published his *Manifesto for Concrete Poetry* three years earlier, in Stockholm. E. Williams (Ed.), op. cit. p.vi

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.14

49 Serving as Max Bill's secretary there from 1954 to 1958, for example. See E. Williams (Ed.), *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, p.334

significant within the mix.⁵⁰ Though not mentioned by the Noigandres poets, in the context of this discussion van Doesburg's output in Dada is certainly notable, both under his alias, I.K. Bonset, formulating his own constructive poetry in 1923⁵¹ and in his working closely with the Dadaists, maintaining dialogue and collaborating, most notably with Schwitters.⁵²

I.K. Bonset (Theo van Doesburg) (ed.), *Mécano no. Yellow*, 1922

Even in 1920, in his writing, there is a focus on the 'intrinsic significance of the word', revealing consistency of thinking in leading to van Doesburg's identification, a few years later, of a colour's 'elementary force', providing clear linkage from all said in the previous section on Roth, to, here, a language equivalent.

50 Along with Futurism, as 'contributions to the life of the problem'. J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.90

51 S. Bann (Ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.109

52 i.e. their 'close collaboration' on Schwitter's *Merz* magazine. J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.55

3.32 Tension: things-words in space-time

The sense of Augusto de Campos' and the Noigandres poets' definition of concrete poetry, 'tension of things-words in space-time',⁵³ given in their *Pilot-Plan for Concrete Poetry*, of 1958, became a central focus for developing this exhibition, and the text *Tension!*, that I contributed to HICA's 2011 publication, reflecting on the show.

Augusto de Campos, *Tensão*, 1956

⁵³ J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.90

'Things-words in space-time' clearly states the relation of the production of forms to the laws of physics, as the basis of the poetry itself.⁵⁴ Van Doesburg's own great interest in the unfolding scientific discoveries in the period he was working,⁵⁵ indicates their central importance in orienting his ideas, and demonstrates also the consistent consideration of time as a fundamental ingredient, from the start and throughout. That is, again, that works necessarily exist in time was not the sole discovery of Tatlin, then forgotten, to be re-discovered in Minimalism. The Noigandres poets also, for instance, emphasise the closeness of poetry and music, seeing music as a time art in which space intervenes, and visual art as a spatial art in which time intervenes.⁵⁶

I discussed Augusto de Campos' poem *Tensão* in my exhibition text, as, having been produced around the same time as his Manifesto, being almost a manifesto in-itself. De Campos comments that the poem 'implies a tension between the temporal reading and the spatial presentation of the written word, music and painting. The very structure of the poem with words placed in virtual squares suggests an ambiguity between two and three dimensions.'⁵⁷ The point of tension comes in working with its material, 'the word (sound, visual form, semantical charge)', and encountering its 'functions-relations';⁵⁸ the poetry occurs in the shifts and ambiguities between states, between how these states function, and how they relate.

3.33 The verbivocovisual as forming and formed, and as means for change

The Noigandres poets employ the word verbivocovisual⁵⁹ as a term which

⁵⁴ "“Space-time” obviously refers to modern physics and the concept of relativity, in that it stresses the interpenetration of space and time in the text'. A. de Campos, (2011). Personal e-mail to the author.

⁵⁵ Baljeu notes the 'many scientific publications' in van Doesburg's library, specifically concerned with a fourth dimension (J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.28), and, indeed his 'adherence to the scientific view of “matter in space-time”'. (Ibid., p.50)

⁵⁶ J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.90

⁵⁷ A. de Campos, (2011). Personal e-mail to the author.

⁵⁸ J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.90

⁵⁹ a neologism from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. A. de Campos, (2011). Personal e-mail to the author.

encapsulates this 'sound, visual form and semantical charge', an equivalent sense to a colours 'elementary force', affirming some inherence of meaning.

The intent of this exhibition was to consider this verbivocovisual nature of the poems in relation to their origins: while the verbivocovisual appears close to Krauss' earlier noted understanding of a 'play of representation' within forms as they are actualised⁶⁰ (rather than their being 'transparent signifiers' of 'original' meanings),⁶¹ we wished to consider how the poems, as indexes of the processes of their development, might still incorporate the influence of such things as personalities and culture, geography and time; where my noting of Thomson's, and Hegel's related senses of 'conformity' may sum up this interest, as part of the environmental pressures within their forming.

Similar to Richard Roth's exhibition then, this show enabled a regional comparison, between poets of different nationalities, and their poems, to reflect on the effects of location on meaning. Again also, through this emphasising of the importance of context, a sense was developed of what may be universal. That is, as concrete poems they overtly 'yield initiative to the words',⁶² in verbivocovisual ways. By doing so they expose and explore common-ground between all languages: they become inherently international, and universal, in outlook.

The exhibition presented adjacent works in English and Portuguese, for example, with only very basic translations of poems available in the exhibition text, to present the likely possibility of a language barrier that might frustrate a literal reading and divert attention to these other kinds of meaning. The poems by Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay, in English, may equally be assessed in terms of a language barrier; their disruptions to syntax and meaning intending to also focus on content other than the literal.⁶³

60 R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.40

61 Ibid., p.32

62 Mallarmé's phrase, quoted in section 1.43

63 While I discuss Morgan's *Chaffinch Map of Scotland* in my exhibition text I have noted that I have not otherwise focussed on the Scottish representatives in the show, either in that text, or here. While it is clearly significant that the Brazilian poets have become the focus in these discussions, the works by Morgan and Finlay were equally important to the exhibition, as works in-themselves, and in their determining, and equal questioning of context.

Spoken and sound poems, and poems produced as music were also presented in the space, expanding the comparison to also encompass the correspondences between language and music.

One effect of this presentation was to question the possibilities for our location; what is an art space in the Highlands able to 'voice'? I observe in my exhibition text for instance, that the presented spoken and sound poems, emphasising what 'subjects and sounds the poets felt able to voice', seemed 'consistent with their speech, and presumably then, with something in the speaker's bearing'.⁶⁴

Here (reflecting on HICA's 'bearing'), the prospect of microphone and recording studio demonstrates, as does a blank canvas, that you reveal yourself in all you do; the focus is again on what becomes inevitably concrete, in considering what actually comes out, what position you assume, what shape things take.

In this way, the etymology of concrete (*crescere*, 'grow', and *con*, 'together') used as the show's title, we considered as particularly suggestive. While highlighting dialogue between the geographically distant, Brazil and Scotland, it, for us, also focussed on this point of tension and becoming, 'the process of development of artworks and poems themselves: the process through which meaning finds form'.⁶⁵

This may be seen to reflect back to earlier examples mentioned, such as Renfrew's, or Marx's, where complex processes of social and intellectual life are judged to be developed from, and still require relation to, the material base. Though, if in that material base 'the laws of physics set the ultimate rules and there can be no exceptions', then Constructivism's seeking to make works 'as the universe constructs its own',⁶⁶ appears to utilise this base in order to affect change in the more fluid construction of culture; the ways that things are done.

Probing what seem the less draconian limitations (than the laws of physics) and possibilities of constructed culture in this way (certainly for our reflections with HICA), promotes awareness of how conversations might be changed through

64 HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.17

65 From the exhibition's press release; Appendix A

66 Gabo and Pevsner's comment in S. Bann, (Ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism*, p.9

tone, posture, details of presentation and so on.

Notably these states were played out as part of the processes of the works in this exhibition. The works may employ and function through their awareness of physical nature, but they do this as cultural artefacts, as statements.

3.34 Physical constraints: solely determining the process?

Décio Pignatari, *Terra*, 1956

The clearest example, Décio Pignatari's *Terra* (Earth), I reflected, does more than

...describing from without, *Terra* acts within the territories of physics, through its own form, manifestation in the exhibition and relation to surroundings. Its title and subject, reinforcing its reflexivity, ponders that which it is comprised of and its own process.⁶⁷

Its repetition, within its self-imposed constraints, produces the poem, creating various new senses from this one word as it does so, such as '*ara a terra* (ploughs the land) *ter rara terra* (to have a rare land), *errar a terra* (to be mistaken about the land), *terra ara terra* (land ploughs land) and, implicitly, *terra terra* (a plain thing).'⁶⁸

John Tyler Bonner, again in his introduction to Thomson's *On Growth and Form*, notes that in 'recent literature... physical rules which limit morphology are called "constraints"', and that there are some 'so-called "structuralists"' who 'believe that the physical forces which set those constraints are themselves entirely responsible for guiding evolution and development.'⁶⁹ This seems very much to be the state presented and contemplated here by Pignatari.

I would suggest again, as in relation to artworks previously, works of this sort having parallels with simple sorts of games, with what might be termed 'concrete' rules; functioning through their exploration of their own empirical geometry, determining allowable moves. In this, both the setting and the objects employed as tokens may be interpreted as expressing universal forces.

The nature of these constraints appears also in common with the restrictions to morphologies of basic geometrical objects. Peter Stevens has reflected on the impressive nature of these; that they either come out 'perfectly or not at all'⁷⁰ and that the conditions for these forms' existence 'have been determined since the world began.'⁷¹ Thus five regular convex polyhedrons are possible, but no more.

⁶⁷ HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.22

⁶⁸ Taken from Haroldo de Campos' discussion of Pignatari's *Terra* in E. Williams (Ed.), *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*. (No page numbers given – the anthology is arranged alphabetically by author.)

⁶⁹ Introduction to W. D'Arcy Thomson, *On Growth and Form*, p.xxii

⁷⁰ P. S. Stevens, *Patterns in Nature*, p.11

⁷¹ Ibid.

Table showing the five regular polyhedrons (from Stevens)

It is significant in this discussion that these are known as the *Platonic Solids*, noted in Plato’s *Timeaus* as the forms embodying the elements. The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy discusses them thus:

[Plato] selects as the basic corpuscles (sômata, “bodies”) four of the five regular solids: the tetrahedron for fire, the octahedron for air, the icosahedron for water, and the cube for earth. (The remaining regular solid, the dodecahedron, is “used for the universe as a whole,” [55c4–6], since it approaches most nearly the shape of a sphere.)⁷²

In the *Timeaus*, the Craftsman (a ‘creator’ figure, proposed as an ‘anthropomorphic representation of Intellect’)⁷³ fashions each of these solids “to be as perfect and excellent as possible...” (53b5–6),⁷⁴ so that they might act to bring order ‘in accordance with the requirements for the construction of the body of the

72 Plato’s *Timaeus*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy [Online] section 8: *Physics*.
73 Ibid., Section 7: *Teleology*
74 Ibid., section 8: *Physics*

universe’.⁷⁵ Lucy Lippard has also referred to research by Keith Critchlow, revealing that ‘the enigmatic tetrahedral stone spheres found in Scottish Neolithic graves... illustrate the regular mathematical symmetries of all Platonic solids’ yet that they “...appear to be at least a thousand years before the time of either Pythagoras or Plato”, reflecting the mathematical sophistication of “primitive” peoples, and the widespread judging of significance in these forms’ geometry.⁷⁶

Scottish Neolithic ‘Platonic Solids’

Stevens goes on to consider that there are also just fourteen semi-regular polyhedrons possible, but no more. Equally there are a limited number (three) of regular and (eight) semi-regular two-dimensional mosaics, and within these forms there are equal limitations as to how they may be constructed, determining the exact combinations of faces and edges.⁷⁷

The very significant point here and for the discussion in this chapter, is to consider how these constraints and rules operate. Rather than ‘The explanation offered in the *Timaeus*... that order is not inherent in the spatio-material universe; it is

75 Ibid.
76 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, p.82
77 P. S. Stevens, *Patterns in Nature*, pp.13-14

imposed by Intellect, as represented by the Craftsman',⁷⁸ the suggestion from the works so far discussed, in relation to the example of these polyhedrons, is that it is the stuff itself, the spatial organisation and the formations this creates, which are responsible; the world is the result of a self-organising immanence. This is always a 'local' generation, but one that produces 'universal' forms, through the pervasive nature of space.⁷⁹

The fourteen semi-regular polyhedrons
(above).

The three regular and eight semi-regular
two-dimensional mosaics (right).

(from Stevens)

⁷⁸ Plato's *Timaeus*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy [Online] section 7: *Teleology*.

⁷⁹ Rupert Sheldrake has commented: 'If the laws of Nature are Pythagorean mathematical truths, or Platonic Ideas, or ideas in the mind of God...' then 'the Laws do not come into being or pass away; they transcend space and time'. (R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, p.3) In opposition to this view he states, '... a new possibility. The regularities of nature are not imposed on nature from a transcendent realm, but evolve within the universe. What happens depends on what has happened before. (Ibid., p.4)

3.35 Posing the question of intentionality; the dilemma of our subject/object relations

An artworks 'tension', its activity, shows in the way these constraints, the rules of the game, work: a good game has good 'tension'. Perhaps curiously, while mainly considering other artworks functioning similarly, such as by GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel), New Tendencies and Arte Programmata, working with the imposed constraints of systems on their art⁸⁰ (a work such as François Morellet's, *Random distribution of 40,000 squares, following the even and uneven numbers of a phonebook, 50% grey, 50% yellow*, of 1962, might be one of the clearest and most well-known examples⁸¹), Rosalind Krauss' comments on Duchamp's *Fountain*, are also brought to mind, her describing this as not having a linear narrative moving toward a clear end, but as something circular 'returning the viewer again and again to the beginning of the question of "why?"'⁸² This it seems to me reflects on the way these works and games engage, the point of their geometry, of their constraints; to frame something that, in that created context, might be ceaselessly engaging, ceaselessly active: an artwork as a 'living', self-organising and self-supporting, network. But this exposes further questions regarding the nature of this engagement.

Stevens' description of the regular and semi-regular polyhedrons, that they either work perfectly or not at all, confirms these as absolutely reliant on the workings of physical nature. Duchamp's *Fountain* however, clearly reliant to an extent on this same physics in its form (in being part of the world), as well as in its play on form, only really functions as artwork in a quite specific context with a quite specific audience.

Thus, equally, while Pignatari's *Terra* may appear to consider physical forces as entirely responsible for the formations it partakes in, the poem itself seems only appreciable as such, it only 'works', through its contextual engagement as a cultural object. That is, its 'functions-relations' extend through the cultural.

⁸⁰ For instance, see M. Rosen (Ed.) *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, A Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973*, p.92 on Morellet's procedures.

⁸¹ See *The Peter C. Ruppert Collection, Concrete Art in Europe After 1945*, p.155

⁸² R. E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, p.78

The question then arises: is it just that things-words in space-time create poetry, or is it the fact that a perceiving mind is contemplating these things that gives it this meaning? Is the poetic ‘tension’ not to do with the things observed, but in the act of observation? This may be a restatement of the difficulties of representation, of reading-in to forms such as Mondrian’s horizontals and verticals. But it more pointedly asks about the predominance of one state over the other: the formations themselves having some inherent poetry, or our interpretations that see the poetry within them?

The ceaseless intrigue in these works, *Terra*, and *Tensão*, seems their constant referring back to our relation to the world in this way, to similarly always return us to questions of how and ‘why?’

I will briefly also consider van Doesburg’s position here as it articulates this question in a way that this whole study may be related to. That is, HICA’s whole project may be judged an effort to similarly reflect and articulate considerations on this same question.

Van Doesburg’s Hegelian outlook very much focusses on a sense of human spirit, opposed to nature, as he opposes his spiritual concerns to those of a functionalist materialism.⁸³ He says for example, ‘With the same hostility as the city is related to the countryside, so is the structure of the human spirit related to that of nature. Spirit is the natural enemy of nature although no duality is created, no matter how paradoxical this may seem.’⁸⁴

While ultimately, in a complex way, these two may be one and the same thing, this still presents a basic, and practical divergence, where some may consider, or aim to consider, the workings of art and of life as purely material formations, others’ see the ‘material’ still as remaining a backdrop to human, spiritual existence.

Joost Baljeu, reflecting on this dilemma as manifested in van Doesburg’s work, relates that;

...Van Doesburg in this respect was approaching, although from a

83 For instance, J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, pp.44-46 on functionalism in architecture, and p.19 on materialism.

84 Ibid., p.154

reverse direction, the concept of the absolute as expressed in the dynamic manifestos of Kemeny and Moholy-Nagy. Although they had opposing views on the relative primacy of the spiritual or the material Van Doesburg and Kemeny and Moholy-Nagy shared common ground in believing that energy, either spiritual or material universal, is an irreducible substance. With Van Doesburg ‘human spirit’ was to become identified more and more with ‘absolute spirit’, in accordance with Hegel’s philosophy. In Hegel’s view, the mind realizes that whatever is opposed to it as an object, as matter, the entire physical and non-physical universe, is nothing other than spirit itself. It can thus grasp that it is itself all being and all reality, which is to say, in fact, the Absolute.⁸⁵

To illustrate this problem’s more general manifestation, I also include here the example given by Aaron Scharf in his comments on Gabo’s distance from a truly Constructivist agenda. Gabo argues that lines, shapes and colours ‘possess their own expressive meanings independent of nature. Their content is based, not directly on the external world, but springs from the psychological phenomena of human emotions.’⁸⁶ This, Scharf point out, is at odds with the ‘utilitarian concepts of the Constructivists’.⁸⁷ ‘It is through enhancing one’s spiritual life that the creative act, [Gabo] says, contributes to material existence. The “constructive idea” is not intended, he insists... to explore the conditions of the physical world, but to sense its truth.’⁸⁸ This then, Scharf states, is opposed to the Constructivist position of being ‘physiologically rather than psychologically orientated...’⁸⁹

This divergence provides a primary point of exploration in developing ideas of concrete and constructivist works, and forms, I contend, a still very pressing dilemma.

85 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.79

86 A. Scharf in N. Stangos (Ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art*, p.167

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., p.168

89 Ibid.

3.36 The example of the works of Geraldo de Barros
as a presentation of this dilemma

Michel Favre’s film on the life and works of Geraldo de Barros,⁹⁰ a prominent figure in Brazilian Concrete art, provided a direct occasion to consider this dilemma, in this exhibition.

De Barros’ works can perhaps be taken as representative of sustained efforts through the remainder of the Twentieth Century, to develop from this divergence. His and others’ related practice, such as that of the Noigandres poets, present a consistent effort as well, maintained largely independently it seems from the dynamic between Greenberg and Krauss and a High Modern to Postmodern, indicating the separation also between the Constructivist and Concrete tendencies and the mainstream contemporary art-world I noted in chapter one.

De Barros experimented in various media through his career, making ‘pioneering work in photography, as well as working in painting, print, graphics and industrial design’.⁹¹ Among other groups, he was a founder member of the Ruptura group in São Paulo.⁹² His geometric Concrete works appear to manifest (as with the procedures considered in the last chapter), a desire for a more reasoned production, and to realise through this the socialising of art.⁹³ Here he may be judged to be developing Constructivist strategies in employing simple geometric forms as means that might communicate with a general public; similarly to the original Constructivists, and their need to communicate with a ‘mostly illiterate’ Russian population.⁹⁴ Again, these forms are those that may also be judged to bring some sense of objective certainty, from observations of how ‘the universe constructs its own’, to bear on the construction of more fluid culture.

Significantly, De Barros also steps back at important points in his career from the identification of Concrete art as solely *Geometric* rather than *Informel*/Abstraction,⁹⁵ and applies himself instead directly to a form of socially engaged practice: the

90 *Geraldo de Barros: Sobras em Obras*, (1999)
91 See the *Grow Together* exhibition press release; Appendix A
92 Ibid.
93 See Augusto de Campos’ comments for instance in *Geraldo de Barros: Sobras em Obras*, (1999) from 22.20mins
94 Tate, *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, p.99
95 See *Geraldo de Barros: Sobras em Obras*, (1999) from 24.45mins

designing and making of furniture, running first the Unilabor cooperative workshop (founded in the early 1950s),⁹⁶ and later the Hobjeto furniture industry.⁹⁷

Geraldo de Barros:
Untitled, 1953. Synthetic enamel on Kelmite

From the series Fotoformas:
Unilabor Chair, 1954. Silver Print

This integration of art practice into the world of work, the aim of ‘social expediency and utilitarian significance, production based on science and technique...’ are of course original intentions of Constructivism, its ‘first principles’.⁹⁸ The making of furniture could also be judged to be reinstating absolute objecthood, in Fried’s

96 Ibid., 27.40mins
97 Ibid., for example, at 44mins
98 Scharf in N. Stangos (Ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art*, p.162

terms: an attempt at unity of art and life, where artists may be in some sense the ‘workmen of art’,⁹⁹ or as Lodder discusses, simply technicians and engineers.¹⁰⁰ Ferreira Gullar, reacting against this Constructivist intent in formulating his Neo-Concrete stance, aims for a ‘transcendence that will distance... from the obscurity of the material object’. He states; ‘The fight against the object continues’.¹⁰¹

Hobjeto store-front, São Paulo, ca. 1987

The point again here though is that there is always something holding de Barros’ furniture back from becoming just objects, that still maintains his sense of being an artist, and keeps returning his focus to the production of artworks through the rest of his life, rather than him becoming just a successful businessman.¹⁰² That is, though the activity he is engaged in may be exactly the same, there is still something in his perception of his activity that keeps it from just being work.

And this is where this state, I suggest, may be seen as still a most pressing dilemma. I would feel that this state would apply also to all those for whom work is work and not art-work; it always remains more than just work as it is the activity

⁹⁹ Augusto de Campos’ comment again, in *Geraldo de Barros: Sobras em Obras*, (1999) 22.44mins

¹⁰⁰ C. Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p.104

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, p.23

¹⁰² See, for instance, *Geraldo de Barros: Sobras em Obras*, (1999) 51.54mins

made the focus of a life. An example from someone’s life who is declared an artist just brings this sense of need for the activity to be more than just a material existence into clearer focus. It seems part of our individual perceptions of our own lives, where an allotment plot analogy again comes to mind, that if people can be said to occupy positions in life, then we are all also engaged in maintaining those positions. And if we are maintaining positions then we are shaping our environment toward our desired ends, individually as well as collectively, in the sure knowledge that at the point we cease this activity our patch will very quickly ‘return to nature’. This, it seems to me, presents Van Doesburg’s drive of spirit over nature as an on-going dilemma, and which perhaps requires, now, much more urgent consideration in relation to a sense of our society’s progress, than it would have in van Doesburg’s day. Is it ever possible to truly step aside from our own interests, or collectively, from our human perspective?

3.37 Nature as this struggle?

We reproduced Haroldo de Campos’ poem, *Cristal Forma*, on the large window at HICA, superimposing the poem onto the surrounding landscape. The poem, as noted in section 2.87, considers poetry’s process of coalescence. It contains the line ‘fome de forma’, the ‘hunger of form’, which I mentioned in discussing Boyle Family’s exhibition, as suggestive of active agency in this process of coalescence.¹⁰³ Overlaying this onto the view of HICA’s surroundings carried this sense over to the landscape’s formation, the processes involved in making it the way it is, and in this way the poem came to reflect on the general sense of the show, contemplating, overall, how meaning finds form. To this end, in my text on the exhibition, I also drew a parallel to our work in producing the show, detailing some of the practical difficulties in setting-up the exhibition. Circumstances always seem worked-through: a negotiation of difficulties, uncertainty and random occurrences to be dealt with, to result in a final form; something that might be judged as satisfying whatever was the originating impulse, even if the end results are quite different from those initially envisaged.

¹⁰³ Haroldo de Campos comments ‘The metaphorical hunger of form and form as a kind of hunger. Crystal as the ideogram of the process’, in E. Williams (Ed.), *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*. (No page numbers given – the anthology is arranged alphabetically by author.)

Haroldo de Campos, *Cristal Forma*, 1958

It is notable in this, that the form of the poem, especially when seen overlaid onto the landscape, is profoundly organic. Though of course the poem's intention, this is perhaps surprising for something coming from a concrete and constructivist tendency in the era still of High Modernism.

Reflecting again on this in the light of my discussion here, it seems that this presents both a sense of processes of nature, and our sense of our own involvements as a, competing, part of it. It presents a Darwinian struggle,¹⁰⁴ the struggles implicit in our conformity with our place in nature, in order to suggest a more than purely material, that is, simply mechanistic, engagement.

Van Doesburg has stated '...rest or harmony cannot be obtained without struggle. Struggle, which reveals itself in creativeness, is proof that spirituality experiences nature as its counterpart, as its contrast. Thus the relationship of the artist towards

¹⁰⁴ See especially C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p.114

his inner and his environmental world is one of contrast.'¹⁰⁵

For Max Bill also, in his statement of 1936 (revised in 1949):

concrete art is... the expression of the human spirit, destined for the human spirit, and should possess that clarity and perfection which one expects from works of the human spirit... It organizes systems and gives life to these arrangements, through the means of art. It is real and intellectual, anaturalist while being close to nature...¹⁰⁶

Where it seems it may be possible to develop from these views now seems indicated by *Cristal Forma*'s foregrounding of this hunger, and thus agency.

Awareness of involvements, of negotiations of circumstance, highlight again the point of tension as a point that hinges, for individuals, on themselves and their own inputs into the state of things. This appears the precise point of activity, where, as I also commented in my exhibition text,¹⁰⁷ things are possible... just...

It is the injecting of some sense of this activity into the presentation of works, to keep them alive in this way, that becomes the fundamental criteria for the show, something that might '...make immediate connection to the context of the space and exhibition, and determine a current meaning.'¹⁰⁸

This sense of activity may be extended to, for instance, determine the point where HICA may 'work' within the rules of its own game, its own constraints.

In this kind of engagement the poems here prompt that they operate at various levels: their literal meanings are alongside, and enfolded with, body language; they highlight their metacommunication.¹⁰⁹ They appear as specialised formations within Nature, rather than in opposition: while directly appealing to our human understandings, they seem ultimately more physiologically oriented, through extending the sense of the physiological: the 'concrete' here, surmising some

¹⁰⁵ J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.119

¹⁰⁶ E. Hüttinger, *Max Bill*, p.61

¹⁰⁷ HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.21

¹⁰⁸ See the *Grow Together* exhibition press release, Appendix A

¹⁰⁹ J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.90

inherent meaning in plastic means, perceives 'intellect' in the physical universe.

(At its most ambitious, the plan for this exhibition had included a filmed interview with Augusto de Campos, for which I was to send a list of possible questions to be put to him. Unfortunately this was one of the casualties of the failure of a main funding application and the consequent re-structuring of the exhibition, though I was still able to have an e-mail dialogue with de Campos through which he sent a brief written response as a reply to my questions overall. Further to this he sent several other documents including past interviews that he felt contained useful answers, relevant to the exhibition, as well as copies of the first correspondence between Ian Hamilton Finlay, Mary Ellen Solt and himself. I have attached documents selected from these here as appendices B.1 and B.2)

3.4 HICA and grey) (area exhibition: *Concretely Immaterial*

25 July – 11 September 2011

(Samuel Cepeda, Nina Czegledy + Marcus Neustetter, Darko Fritz,
Andreja Kulunčić, Edita Pecotić, Transfer, Goran Trbuljak,
Geoff Lucas, Eloi Puig, Thomson + Craighead)

3.41 The origins of the *Concretely Immaterial* project; considering the extent of the 'concrete'

The *Concretely Immaterial* exhibition presents a further example of purposeful dialogue between geographical locations in this year. The show developed from our dialogue with Darko Fritz, curator, organiser and founder of grey) (area space in Korčula, Croatia, around our interests in developing ideas of Concrete art and our engaging these through maintaining programmes in 'remote' locations.¹¹⁰ The resulting exhibition, between HICA and grey) (area, also included works by artists from around Europe as well as from Canada, South Africa and Mexico.¹¹¹

Fritz has described his interest in running grey) (area as exploring the freedom

¹¹⁰ Korčula is an island in the Adriatic, near Split, in the South of Croatia

¹¹¹ See the *Concretely Immaterial* exhibition's press release; Appendix A

of the 'cultural periphery'.¹¹² This, combined with his particular focus on early computer art and artists who formed the New Tendencies,¹¹³ reflects much of the basis of the show, and how it came to consider the correspondence between our mutual concerns with the Concrete, and our presenting of exhibitions which are generally experienced, in some way, virtually.

Planned to be simultaneously held at both spaces (though this did not work out in practice), the show expanded on this concern, to question how, while viewing works in one 'remote' area of the globe, related activity could be understood to be taking place in some other, equally 'remote' space, elsewhere. Or to consider this awareness at least, such that, through imagination or the internet, the question was further posed as to whether this truly was a virtual experience, or still necessarily concrete if generated by some minute electrical signal between circuits in computers, synapses in the brain, and so on.

Through our discussion we realised a lack of words that might be employed in properly describing our sense of this: things immediately became 'immaterial', 'intangible', 'insubstantial', where we wished to highlight how, to our understanding, things were still absolutely substantial, but just... very small, highly ephemeral, very... 'thin'. Language appears to demand the immaterial; a significant difficulty, we found, in seeking to further discuss a sense of what a 'concrete' art might be. There appears the common assumption that the concrete must be something we can grasp. What if though, there are found to be aspects beyond our grasp: rather than the conclusion of, 'therefore; the immaterial', we sought to consider the opposite; that perhaps our sense of the concrete needs modifying?

¹¹² i.e. '...enjoying the free position of the cultural periphery and challenge of no context of neither contemporary nor media art within the close neighborhood. Periphery provides freedom of established cultural power-games, predictable fashionable key-words and double criteria (that depend on geo-political position of the art-producer) and other positions of predictable artist reputation's building system of cultural industry...' excerpt from grey) (area statement contained in D. Fritz (2011), E-mail: *Fwd: gray) (area :: Korcula :: Edita Pecotic: Moreska*. Personal e-mail to the author.

¹¹³ 'As researcher and curator I try to establish connection between Concrete, neo-constructivist, arte programata, and lumino-kinetic art of the late 1950's and beginning 1960s in link to computer-generated art (as well in continuing with link to Conceptual art), all in case-study of New tendencies movement, that already at a time made this connections.' From D. Fritz (2010), E-mail: *Re: meet each other: Darko and Geoff*. Personal e-mail to the author.

3.42 The concrete and conceptual: moving from a rational 'conceptual', toward Nature

The relation of the concrete to the conceptual is certainly explored within the particular art-historical context; by New Tendencies artists, for instance, who, as Margit Rosen notes, made the curatorial focus of *Tendencies 5*, the last exhibition of the New Tendencies, a confronting of 'visual research by computer with an artistic current associated with the non-visual – with Conceptual art'.¹¹⁴ While 'a binding curatorial model was not proposed',¹¹⁵ the Croatian art historian and critic, Radoslav Putar, one of the organisers of the exhibition,¹¹⁶ '...implicitly indicated that one might also describe processes of Conceptual art as data processing'.¹¹⁷

Rosen outlines the problems faced by this New Tendencies exhibition. She compares *Tendencies 5*'s approach to 'the application of the computer as a visual means' and, Jack Burnham's 1970 exhibition *Software. Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art*, for example, which rather 'dealt with underlying structures of communication'.¹¹⁸ She further notes the more significant opposition that became apparent through the realisation of the *Tendencies 5* project; between the approaches of contributors; those who took a direct constructive, or a critical and conceptual approach to the technology,¹¹⁹ and considers that, in the end '... the dynamic term "visual research" lost ground to the static designation "computer art". Information aesthetics... was likewise dismissed as having failed'.¹²⁰ She concludes her reflection on the project by referring to 'the clash between Joseph Beuys and Max Bense'¹²¹ during a panel discussion in Düsseldorf in 1970 [which] was the visibly spectacular finale to the project of a rational, mathematically oriented aesthetics that had sought to demystify art and the artist'.¹²²

114 M. Rosen (Ed.) *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, A Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973*, p.39

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid., p.482

117 Ibid., p.39

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

121 the German philosopher, who taught at Ulm, and whose work was 'decisive' in the 'development of the coupling of technical information theory and aesthetics' Ibid., p.44

122 Ibid., p.39

It appears largely this same approach to the rational and mathematical understanding of the concrete and conceptual, that has been revived to some extent by those such as Haus Konstruktiv, as I have earlier considered, in section 1.21. Their exhibitions and collections perhaps again implying thought and the 'conceptual' as comparable to processes of computing.

Here, as it may be observed that Max Bill and Max Bense 'personify the link between the rational line of European abstraction and information theory, two models that shaped design education in Ulm and had a clear influence on the New Tendencies',¹²³ there appears a further moment considering the, more particular and developed than van Doesburg's, sense of potential for a science of art making. As the organisers of the fourth New Tendencies event '...launched a publication that focused on presenting information theory, exact aesthetics, and communication and mass media',¹²⁴ (titled BIT International), '...exhibitions, conferences, and the magazine... brought together art theoreticians, engineers, scientists, and artists to discuss the possibilities for an art, as Bense formulated it, of "technical existence"'.¹²⁵

This HICA and grey) (area exhibition, while concerned with these same areas, for reasons previously explored and in on-going consideration, opposed this sense of a science of art. The particular question of the computability of thought, and thus of art, will form part of the next chapter. Here, to continue the outlining of the intentions of this exhibition, I suggest it's extending instead of the logic of others' in HICA's programme, such as Esther Polak's and Ivar van Bakkum's, focus on unseen but concrete occurrences. Where they demonstrated the difficulties of comprehension due to individuals occupying always a particular location, the intention here was to infer from this experience of the non-virtual, the consideration of other imperceptible occurrences as just part of the functioning material world: the logically proposed conclusion; the physical nature of the conceptual and of consciousness: their being aspects of the same physical world rather than of a separate (perhaps rational) order. This, what amounts to another discussion of the transcendent or immanent, in this case specifically concerning Mind, is also

123 Ibid. It is of interest here also that the Argentinian Concrete artist Almir Mavignier, who curated the first New Tendencies exhibition, had also studied at Ulm.

124 Ibid., p.45

125 Ibid.

implied by the comparison of concrete and conceptual by the New Tendencies, but indicates a conclusion of a very different nature.

New Tendencies artists accepted a 'qualified production of Concrete and Constructivist art',¹²⁶ leading towards such things as computer art, as well as developing the more overt social engagement in the production and receiving of the works themselves: a purposefully loose grouping of artists,¹²⁷ they aimed for their works to be based on 'reciprocity', 'active participation' and the 'social'.¹²⁸ As Karl Gerstner, a founder member of the group, said; 'we want ideas to be subjective or, in other words, new; and our creations to be objective or, in other words, anonymous';¹²⁹ a developing focus on the subjective experience of the audience in common with contemporary art more generally, at the time.

A sense of the genealogy of practice of artists such as Polak and van Bekkum, or those contributing to this HICA and grey) (area exhibition, might include then, alongside GRAV and New Tendencies, these groups' acceptance also of 'certain signs of Tachism and more than a little kinship with neo-Dadaism',¹³⁰ indicative of a developing direction of reasonably contemporaneous groupings, ranging between more or less identifiably concrete-related practice: for instance, Fluxus, Nouveau Réalisme, and Arte Povera, who all exhibit a desire for a more direct experiencing of their artworks, frequently including necessary engagements of audience. In this, Germano Celant's observation of works' aiming to act as '... social gestures in and of themselves, as formative and compositive liberations which aim at the identification between man and world'¹³¹ indicates a new and developing sympathy, which Umberto Eco has also noted (in discussing the Arte Programmata group), as intending to negotiate the '...old dichotomy: either mathematical rule, or chance'.¹³² Celant's comment, seeking identification between man and world, suggests the realisation of this 'negotiation' as something more involved in Nature. Here I would wish to highlight his identification as part of the

126 Ibid., p.94

127 Ibid., p.162

128 Ibid., p.163

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid., p.94

131 G. Celant, *Notes for a Guerrilla War*, in C. Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, p.194

132 U. Eco, *Arte Programmata*, in M. Rosen (Ed.) *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, A Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973*, p.99

whole broad shift from the rational and modern to the irrational and postmodern, as a turn toward a more 'natural' relation, conducted through the middle of the last century by, amongst others, those individuals and groups mentioned in my section 1.63, in discussing David Bellingham's exhibition.

Presenting an opposing stance in this same broad discussion, Waldemar Cordeiro, the 'theoretical mastermind of Grupo Ruptura and the figurehead of Concrete art in São Paulo',¹³³ while concerned with developing interest in working with computers, as specifically an art of number,¹³⁴ and in contact with those involved in the New Tendencies¹³⁵ sees this 'new naturalism' as deeply problematic; 'Since utopia has been outmoded, all that remains is hedonism, the amusement park, and the kaleidoscope.'¹³⁶

3.43 Examples of exhibited works; their 'natural' relation and engagement of constraints

These particular historic discussions may be seen as relevant context to the development of works in this exhibition. To consider a couple of examples here:

Nina Czegledy and Marcus Neustetter's *Visual Collider* project, a collaborative bookwork, and 'manifestation of a remote working exchange process'¹³⁷ presents a very low-tech alternative to the Large Hadron Collider. The work states an interest in what might be at the forefront of current science and technology, but reflects, through responses to juxtaposed imagery of scenes mainly from the artists' home countries, Canada and South Africa, on how our everyday experience may present to us some equivalent sense of the physics explored in the LHC.

Accompanying the *Visual Collider* is the *Visual Collider Diagram*, which charts

133 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, p.27

134 Rosen notes Cordeiro's seeing of continuity between the classical and contemporary avant-gardes, where both "translate the work into numbers", with computers providing a new "...digitalization of artistic language", in M. Rosen (Ed.) *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, A Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973*, p.34

135 such as in his dialogue with Božo Bek, of BIT International. Ibid., p.241

136 Ibid., p.202

137 As noted by Sarah Cook in HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.26

the piece's progression through different exhibition spaces, to draw a parallel to the spinning of particles in the LHC; Dalcrombie now added to Brooklyn, Banff, Istanbul, Vienna, and so on.

Nina Czegledy and Marcus Neustetter

Visual Collider, 2009 (detail). (Above)

Visual Collider Diagram, 2009 (dimensions variable, digital print). (Below)

Fritz' own piece, *204_No_Content*, reproduces this familiar internet error message on a hillside in Fuerteventura; the pixels constituting this message from the 'virtual' world, concretised as units, each containing an individual cactus. The form of the work again frustrates a literal reading, of the text to its surroundings, to reflect instead on its new context and open this up to interpretation: what has

no content? Is this an absence in language, the physical world, some teleological lack?

Darko Fritz, *204_NO_CONTENT*, 2007 (Below: detail view)

This work of Fritz', having been variously discussed in the development of the show (including considering reproducing it at HICA), was in the end presented as documentary material: video and photographs.

While demonstrating their concern with science and technology and variously employing these in their process, these works, as representative of the contributions to the exhibitions as a whole, seek (comparatively, very) low-tech solutions to engaging operations on the scale of the LHC. This approach, notably, manifests their concerns in more overtly concrete form (i.e. the collisions of particles compared to the juxtaposition of photographs), both more easily enabling an audiences' engagement, and presenting the work in much closer connection with the everyday, with Celant's identification perhaps, and with the more 'natural' side of this earlier dialogue.

Certainly such things as cost, here, may be judged as 'real' (un-self-conscious), formally determining constraints on the works, reflecting also on the overall form of the exhibition.¹³⁸

In engaging a sense of what might be a more 'natural' relation these works avoid the move made by the Neo-Concretists toward greater expression. The works remain non-expressive, and 'rational' to the extent that they are subject to systems still in some way similar to Morellet's aim towards '...real, controlled experiments',¹³⁹ where 'rules established prior to the actual act...' (in Morellet's case, of painting), '...determine its execution',¹⁴⁰ but which are made to allow for the inclusion of random elements: minimising still, in this way, the input of the artist, emphasises the works as facts to be negotiated, where chance is allowed to operate through both the audience's and the artist's own uncertain responses. Morellet states that this may be to the extent that the audience are able to '...take part in the "creation" of works...',¹⁴¹ and here also, perhaps in subtle form, the audiences determine their own meanings and responses. The most explicit in this regard, in the exhibition of works at HICA, were Goran Trbuljak's poster works, placed anonymously in Edinburgh during the period of the show,¹⁴² and Andrea Kulunčić's work based on interviews with tourists in Korčula, both of which took

138 Sarah Cook, in her discussion of the show, for instance asks 'Is economics here also a kind of system determining the reconciliation of form to content?' HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.29

139 M. Rosen (Ed.) *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, A Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973*, p.92

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid.

142 It is notable here that Trbuljak had taken part in the *Tendencies 5* exhibition.

the form of documentary materials in the exhibition space itself, while the works exhibited at grey) (area, works by Thomson and Craighead, Eloi Puig, and myself, as Sarah Cook also notes, were more 'embodied and sited within their screening conditions',¹⁴³ such that viewers' responses were more clearly prompted in the space of the exhibition itself.

Goran Trbuljak, *Old and depressive anonymous is looking for a permanent display place in some nice new art museum space*, anonymous poster work

Andreja Kulunčić, *Commercialization of the History*, 2010
Prints and text, intervention in public space

143 HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.29

3.44 The conceptual as material? Pursuing the logic of a more overt monist identification

The point to highlight here, as part of our conception of the show, is that, especially through the possible technological presentation of works (for instance, information related by websites or through imagination), ‘such things as the works’ effects in the spaces of the galleries, and the experience of the viewers’ are suggested ‘as substantial and real’.¹⁴⁴ That is, if a factor such as economics can be judged a real effect in determining meaning, then a ‘virtual’ experience may here be suggested as equally real, equally pervasive.

Through this text I have considered that the conceptual interpretation of objects may not be the problem it first appears for material understandings of artworks, and may be seen instead as a necessary aspect of relational interpretation. Further to this, in this chapter, the psychological, or in van Doesburg’s terms, ‘spiritual’ understandings, our perspectives from our inevitable human standpoint, may be, following van Doesburg’s view, a paradoxical opposition to Nature ultimately reconciled in a greater unity (thus these understandings are perhaps not in absolute opposition, but rather are a particular formation with a role as a part, or a focus, of wider Nature). The underlying proposition of this show developed this sense to consider conceptual processes as an aspect of a physical unity, as material in-themselves; part of the same materiality as the artworks.

Here a further identification may be relevantly made in regard to both the intentions of this exhibition, and the continuing dialogue around the work of van Doesburg. Joost Baljeu considers that certain points in Art Concret appear critical of Hegel and move more towards Schoenmaekers; van Doesburg repudiates ‘...Hegel’s fundamental type of romantic art’, and reacts against ‘Hegel’s idea that religion or philosophy were eventual substitutes for art.’¹⁴⁵ Baljeu notes Schoenmaekers’ definition of Hegel’s pantheism in this, as ‘contemplative-concrete pantheism’ in contrast to Schoenmaekers’ own ‘visual-concrete pantheism’,¹⁴⁶ a position which Mondrian had perhaps attracted van Doesburg’s attention to. The significance for Schoenmaekers in making this distinction, Baljeu suggests, is its visualization of

¹⁴⁴ See the *Concretely Immaterial* exhibition press release; Appendix A

¹⁴⁵ J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.98

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

‘externality in nature as a plastic union of counterparts’,¹⁴⁷ the view that ‘one thing can be another’s counterpart without being its opposite. Art and nature are thus considered as counterparts, without necessarily being taken as opposites.’¹⁴⁸

Here Baljeu states:

Hegel’s categorical use of opposites... leads to the isolation of one of the components of a polarity (i.e. of spirit). This component is then turned into an absolute entity “by and for itself”, as a substitute for the real unity of related counterparts. Schoenmaeker’s criticism of Hegel could equally be applied to van Doesburg’s Elementarist art in that it isolates the spiritual.¹⁴⁹

Especially in the light of this debate around pantheistic elements in these philosophies, Baljeu’s earlier discussion of van Doesburg’s and Mondrian’s first working together in De Stijl, from around 1916,¹⁵⁰ also seems highly significant. Describing van Doesburg’s ‘searching for expressions of universal intelligibility in both the theory and practice of art’,¹⁵¹ Baljeu states Mondrian’s close following, and van Doesburg’s early opposition to Schoenmaekers.¹⁵² Van Doesburg instead, in this dialogue, advises Mondrian to read Spinoza.¹⁵³

Slavoj Žižek has noted that ‘Georgi Plekhanov, the creator of the term “dialectical materialism”, also described Marxism as “dynamized Spinozism”’,¹⁵⁴ a further significant identification which points to the relevance of Spinoza’s philosophy to this discussion, perhaps especially relevant at this point, in part considering the move of various groups through the 1960s toward an ‘identification between man and world’; an intended shift of focus from the solely human, towards something suggestive of a union of counterparts in Nature.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.99

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.99-100

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.100

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.21

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.29

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid. Baljeu notes that this is about the time that van Doesburg also starts to read Hegel

¹⁵⁴ S. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p.228

Spinoza's 'God or Nature'¹⁵⁵ thus introduces here a more overt monist consideration as a significant formative influence on van Doesburg, relevant to continued thinking around ideas of historical materialism.

Through this identification Spinoza considers that all things are constituted from a '...single self-subsistent substance... which is the cause, directly or indirectly, of all things, and which is self-created.'¹⁵⁶ This is a fundamentally non-transcendent vision: 'God must be immanent in the natural order, the creator in its creation...'¹⁵⁷

To an extent we can perceive this '...rational order which constitutes God or Nature', and 'Using his natural powers of reasoning, a free person... can work out for himself what is the necessary framework of human knowledge.'¹⁵⁸ This description, I suggest, bears parallels to earlier discussion of our experience of the nature of space, as 'a real agent that gives rise to all the rest of the material world... the primeval stuff from which all else springs' (section 3.23): we encounter its constant expression in material things, and may understand something of its nature through this experience.

Space, or substance, equally present a basic physical but universal nature, that provide means of understanding van Doesburg's sense of painting, for instance, as an 'intellectual search for the truth by means of a visual culture.'¹⁵⁹

H.L.C. Jaffé has also noted a parallel between the methods of De Stijl and Spinoza, as perhaps the most significant parallel in method in Dutch tradition. He suggests that they both 'chose the geometrical method of presentation in order to free... arguments from arbitrary or casual interpretation'.¹⁶⁰

'...I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies',¹⁶¹ Spinoza might employ a theorem where De Stijl, a painting, or Polak and van Bakkum (notably, also Dutch...), GPS.

155 Stuart Hampshire notes Spinoza's identification of 'God or Nature' as the basis of his philosophy, which thus begins the *Ethics*. In B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.vii

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid., p.viii

159 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.181

160 M. Friedman (Ed.), *De Stijl: 1917-1931, Visions of Utopia*, p.13

161 B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.69

The particular emphasis of Spinoza's philosophy on a monist unity and the conclusion he draws from this position seem helpful in many ways in clarifying points in this discussion thus far, and will be considered as a further basic point of orientation. The consideration, first made in relation to Alec Finlay's and Alexander and Susan Maris' show, for example, of the infinitesimal complexity of temporal meanings, the consequent difficulty of understanding this as a material relation, may be judged afresh, especially in the light of our proposition with this *Concretely Immaterial* exhibition, as part of the infinite Spinoza stresses as basic to substance, that '...includes within itself everything that exists'.¹⁶²

As human beings we necessarily think of reality as divided into the material and thought: Spinoza suggests that 'Nature as a whole, and every living and persisting individual within it, must be thought of as a composite unity of body and mind, of Extension and Thought.'¹⁶³ As, 'reality is inexhaustible, and there must be infinite ways in which it can be thought of',¹⁶⁴ these aspects, he suggests, are only two possible views of a single reality, '...we can switch from considering reality under one heading to considering things under the other...'¹⁶⁵

This sense, that all things are equally part of one substance, equally understandable as a unity of extension and thought, seems again informing in relation to van Doesburg's identification of plastic means; of the significance of the word, or the elementary force of colours.

A last point to make here especially in discussion of this *Concretely Immaterial* show is Spinoza's reflection on the powers of the imagination and of a particular sense he determines from this of a kind of 'group-think'. He concludes from the unity of all individual bodies, as one substance,¹⁶⁶ that numbers of bodies may be united and act as composites,¹⁶⁷ indeed, 'the human body is composed of a great many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite',¹⁶⁸ and, 'All material things, including living organisms, have a Chinese-box structure, being composed of bodies within bodies up to ever higher levels of complexity,

162 B. Spinoza, *Ethics* p.viii

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid., p.ix

165 Ibid., p.viii

166 Ibid., p.41

167 Ibid., p.42

168 Ibid., p.44

with elementary particles... at the bottom level'.¹⁶⁹ Our sense of being unified individuals, by this, is something of an illusion.

As our bodies, so our minds are also composite in an equal way. Our minds may also be affected by awareness of other bodies, things that are not present but which we may imagine, our subjective associations of words and things and so on.¹⁷⁰

There seem two especially relevant propositions from these points, in consideration of this *Concretely Immaterial* exhibition: first, it provides another sense of things we may consider ourselves to experience virtually, being in actuality real affects; second, this suggestion of our own composite nature in a world of other composite things, enacts a very radical change in our perspective: we are stated as one very small (and even then, composite) constituent, of an infinite thing. 'Part of the grandeur of the *Ethics* is its calm rejection of any idea of humanity's special election and of its privileged dominance of the universe.'¹⁷¹ Thus, I suggest this exhibition and the works that constituted it may also be seen in this light, in the various ways it enabled awareness of concurrency and of our immersion in others' narratives; the show's own narratives, as some form of composite entity in-itself, and our awareness of these aspects as they were; variously extended through the employing of recent technologies.

3.5 HICA exhibition: Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen

24 September – 30 October 2011

3.51 Subjectivity: isolated and anthropocentric or 'plural and polyphonic'?

This questioning of a solely anthropocentric viewpoint can be related to each exhibition in this chapter; of differing cultural views of the same things, such as colour charts, perhaps leading to a sense of interpretations from differing consciousnesses; the independent operations of things-words in space-time, an awareness of concurrency, and so on.

169 Ibid., p.xiv

170 Ibid., pp.44-45

171 Ibid., p.xvi

It is presented as well in works by other artists in HICA's programme, such as Thomson and Craighead's, developing awareness beyond our individual horizons.

In each case this enables the gaining of perspective, the, as again with Spinoza (and what I suggest may be seen as paralleled in the paintings of De Stijl, for example) consequent developing of relational judgements: thus the significance of Spinoza's insights being presented as ethics, not morals, based on immanent, not transcendent values.

If we become aware that we live in our own bubble, our own allotment again perhaps, and live to maintain and develop that patch, then awareness of interactions with, and encroachments on neighbours, the dealing with inevitable conflicts of interest may be aided by realising that ours is not the only patch, but is involved with and reliant on a multitude.

The example of an artist such as Geraldo de Barros would demonstrate some, at least similar, sensibility in their own practice; working to develop reasoned understandings of universal content which may then be applied in the socialising of art: a democratic and equalising effect, the artist working within the society rather than standing outside it as a lone genius.

This position, stated currently, would exhibit some faith in globalisation, as the developing of the widest and most reasoned perspective possible, to reflect the ethical light gained back into the darkest corners of the 'local'; a particular sense of 'think globally, act locally'.¹⁷²

This wider perspective, variously afforded by de-centring human and individual concerns, appears to provide insight, necessary in making connection to the considerations of subjectivity made by Felix Guattari, as discussed by Nicolas Bourriaud. Perhaps this is a natural enough connection, given Plekhanov's identification again of historical materialism as 'dynamized Spinozism' and

172 Naturally this sense may be seen as relevant to HICA's location. I would suggest that while it has been part of our project, to consider whether a global understanding of contemporary art practice can now be universally applied, and to be something of a live experiment in this, this also presents a difficulty we have been aware of in perceptions of HICA. Our main focus through our location, as explored here in this thesis, has been more on such things as our immediate relation to 'nature'.

Bourriaud's noting of the 'Marxist backdrop' to Guattari's concerns.¹⁷³

Bourriaud details Guattari's developing from a 'determination to handle existence like a network of interdependent factors, stemming from a unifying ecology...' ¹⁷⁴ of a 'plural, polyphonic definition of subjectivity'.¹⁷⁵ This 'plural' view of subjectivity, 'the set of relations that are created between the individual and the vehicles of subjectivity he comes across, be they individual or collective, human or inhuman', ¹⁷⁶ appears a further recognition of a composite nature, establishing some equality between our own individual awareness and others' and our environments' equally composite natures.

For Guattari a 'process of singularization'¹⁷⁷ is a more correct way to see our subjectivity; an individual construction, rather than a natural property, and, significantly, constructed by the incorporation of collective subjectivities.¹⁷⁸ That is, his concern is to 'unstick' subjectivity from the subject,¹⁷⁹ judging that it 'spills considerably beyond the limits of the individual.'¹⁸⁰ And it is only through our 'mastery' of collective subjectivities that we are able to construct our individual awareness: 'it is by extending the territory of the subjective to the regulatory impersonal machinery of sociability that Guattari can call on its "re-singularization", going beyond the traditional notion of ideology.'¹⁸¹

This sense I suggest as a bridge between the concerns of our *Concretely Immaterial* exhibition, considering as real our engagements with the values of spaces, even those presumed as virtual, extended via technology (as equivalents to 'collective subjectivities'), and a sense apparent in the work of Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, presented in their exhibition *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*, of more the individual relation to this subjectivity, the processes by which composite entities are formed, and eventually disperse.

173 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.90

174 Ibid., p.92

175 Ibid., p.91

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid., p.92

178 Ibid., p.91

179 Ibid., p.90

180 Ibid.

181 Ibid.

3.52 Intervening in the 'discursive flow'

Here Guattari's ideas of the importance of art objects in the construction of individual and collective subjectivities is highly significant: art is defined as a 'process of non-verbal semiotization...', a 'subjectivity as production...' (a point to which comments such as Gerstner's, regarding the procedures of the New Tendencies, may be related), '...a fulcrum around which forms of knowledge and action can freely pitch in...' ¹⁸² By this, for Guattari, artistic practice 'provides potential models for human existence in general.' (Bourriaud quotes Nietzsche; the "invention of life possibilities").¹⁸³

This point links concerns, in all of HICA's exhibitions, with what appears the characteristically Modern 'activity' of the artwork.

Norman Bryson similarly describes art's activity in the 'social formation'.¹⁸⁴ In *Semiology and Visual Interpretation*,¹⁸⁵ he discusses how artworks are not appropriated or used by the social formation, they, as part of their functioning as signs unfold 'within the social formation from the beginning.'¹⁸⁶ He focusses on Manet's exhibiting of *Olympia*, as example, in the Salon of 1865, to consider how such an image, and its presenting, may enable change in wider discourses. The power of artworks is, he suggests, more subtle than that which might affect direct social or political change, such as attitudes toward prostitution in Paris at the time.¹⁸⁷ Their power may instead be 'microscopic and discrete, a matter of local moments of change, and... such change may take place whenever an image meets the existing discourses, and moves them over; or finds its viewer, and changes him or her'.¹⁸⁸ By this action artworks may affect the 'shifting, the redirecting of the discursive flow. Power not as a monolith, but as a swarm of points traversing social stratifications and individual persons.'¹⁸⁹

182 Ibid., p.88

183 Ibid.

184 N. Bryson, M. A. Holly & K. Moxey (Eds.), *Visual Theory*, p.66

185 Ibid., pp.61-73

186 Ibid., p.66

187 Ibid., p.70

188 Ibid., p.71

189 Ibid.

His identification from this of artworks as projective signs¹⁹⁰ is particularly related to paintings and the contexts of their presentation, which he suggests do not have a 'classical' relation of sign to signified, but instead develop meanings by way of the context into which, in their on-going presence in their materiality as signs, they project into.¹⁹¹

The operations he suggests here may be extended, I would argue, from this more particular art context to consideration within our usual relations to our surroundings, which we are constantly negotiating by means of equivalent awareness: artworks standing out from this generally 'active' background only insofar as they are more focussed and purposeful instances of this (a small difference that in some contexts perhaps makes all the difference).

For Spinoza, thought and extension are two ways to consider the same reality: we encounter forms as we encounter their 'thought',¹⁹² they are direct expressions of physical universality and may be considered for their embodiment of something that seems also to go 'beyond the traditional notion of ideology'. We judge and interpret their shape, their bearing. Their presence emanates equivalent 'intellect'.

Here this wider sense of ideology appears to have material presence also, both as pervasive awareness, in understandings of how things are done, and directly in the things that we surround ourselves with. We may judge our modes of behaviour, processed through the 'impersonal machinery of sociability',¹⁹³ where individual conduct may equally be seen as 'active'; determining how we sit, how we talk, the manner of our bearing, as well as informing in this our sense of difference. We may learn through observation and understanding of the collective subjectivities we find ourselves within, but our process of individuation also enables change and transgression: experimentation equally sending out streamers, perhaps 'microscopic and discrete', that may meet environmental feelers and enact some 'redirecting of the discursive flow'.

190 Ibid., pp.71-72

191 Ibid., p.71

192 B. Spinoza, *Ethics* p.viii

193 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.90

3.53 Considering the employing of objects within the process of the 'discursive flow'

In considering how this relates especially to Mackenna and Janssen's *Museum of Loss and Renewal*, again Bourriaud's comments on Guattari are helpful: 'the process of singularization consists... in incorporating these signifiers in personal "existential territories", as tools helping to invent new relations "to the body, to fantasy, to time passing, to the 'mysteries' of life and death"'.¹⁹⁴

These particular 'mysteries', life and death, form a recurrent theme in the work of Mackenna and Janssen, who further consider the revealing of our relations to these mysteries, through the 'value and significance of objects'.¹⁹⁵

For them, alongside other significances, all objects appear to whisper the same 'memento mori' as whispered by the slave riding in the chariot of a triumphant Roman general,¹⁹⁶ suggesting the artists' awareness of their (the objects) and our own composite natures.

Fittingly enough then their exhibition focussed on items donated to hospice charity shops, forming from these carefully composed still-life, nature morte, arrangements within cardboard 'vitrines': 'Re-presenting items such as clothes, music, videos, books and bric-a-brac, they question the value of 'things', and how they determine and reflect identities and histories'.¹⁹⁷

These things' presentation emphasised the notion of recycling, of how objects that may have appeared inseparable parts of one personality, may be isolated and re-integrated into different spheres; the vitrines comparable to composite bodies, containers and concretisations of personalities; their accumulations including some elements clearly carefully chosen for their particular significance, some inclusions seemingly more random, perhaps chosen on a whim, for more straightforwardly aesthetic reasons, to reflect a 'mood'.

194 Ibid., p.92

195 See the exhibition's press release; Appendix A

196 See for instance, *Roman Triumph* [Online]: '...the Triumph focused on the general himself, and promoted him – however temporarily– above every mortal Roman... In some accounts, a companion or public slave would, from time to time, remind him of his own mortality (a memento mori)...'

197 See the exhibition's press release; Appendix A

Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*
Loss Becomes Object, Installation view, 2011

Here, comments I made in HICA's application to support the project, based partly on notes provided by the artists though focussed on the project's and HICA's appeal in terms of demand and public benefit, discuss HICA's concerns with methodological developments of Concrete Art, such as with the New Tendencies and critical modes developed by artists such as Haacke:

Contemporary art's exploration of meaning in relation to spaces and objects may enable insight into, and understanding of, other cultural practices: here, the current culture surrounding issues of life and death, the everyday inclusion of this on our High Streets via charity shops. The artists' intimate involvement in this exchange through the form of this exhibition provides ways-in to understanding contemporary art for a general public as well as for those with specialist interest in other related areas... The opening up of this dialogue, demonstrating the place art has in matters as important as life and death, can engage and build a future audience; inspiring new interest and confidence in understandings of contemporary art.¹⁹⁸

198 HICA, *Application form for Organisations 2010/2011 (New Work)*, Q.24: *Public Benefit and Demand*

The artists' adapting of these comments to form a direct discussion of their own works¹⁹⁹ perhaps presents a negating of these Concrete methodologies and an emphasising of their authorial presence; a more problematic reading of these works then as a form of Symbolist montage: without this sense of recycling the vitrines could be read as intended to reveal an 'inner' sense emanating through their various elements, especially given the nature of these particular objects, their reflecting on the subject of death and frequent references to artists such as Van Gogh.

Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen
Forces of Attraction and Repulsion (detail), 2011
Life is Short, Art Long (detail), 2011

199 T. Mackenna, & E. Janssen, *Loss Becomes Object Becomes Subject*, p.31

Here the exhibition presents a moment of consideration of ‘concrete’ meaning, as so far discussed. The perhaps morbid focus on these objects, and on death, their possible Symbolist reading, recall Augusto de Campos’ comments on the beginnings of ‘concrete’ inclinations in poetry, and the results of these inclinations’ development.²⁰⁰ De Campos considers an early poem by Décio Pignatari, *The Jester and the Black Prostitute*, in which he describes the poem’s both thematic and literal move towards concrete means of expression, employing such things as portmanteau words; ‘word montages that allow for a simultaneity of different meanings’.²⁰¹ (Again, Krauss’ sense of forms’ ‘play of representation’ seems equally apt.) The poet, in Pignatari’s poem, is the ‘clown-priest’, ‘tortured by the angst of expression’, the black prostitute; their poem, and the morbidity of the scene; the relation of artist to artwork.²⁰² The potential the artwork is given (as a “tired cornucopia between festoons of withered roses”²⁰³) presents a comparison to Bryson’s reflections on Manet’s *Olympia*, and its subject. As de Campos explores, the developing of concrete means offers an escape from artworks’ morbidity; the poet’s yielding of initiative to the artwork equalizes the relationship, removing the torment of their need for individual expression and results in an empowering of the image itself.²⁰⁴

Thus, as for the Symbolists, the escape from these morbid relations is through an awareness of the artwork as an equal object in the world. Our relation to these objects and to the world is as constituents of composite bodies, whose recycling is just part of a continued concrete existence, a dispersal which also suggests an escape from the total annihilation of death, and thus ultimately, from some sense of its morbidity.

The overt stating of this recycling, in this exhibition, combined with one image from the slide projection *No Neutral Representations*, containing the text ‘you are created by objects as much as you create them’, focussed a level of questioning throughout the images and objects displayed, indicating this alternative conclusion.

200 J. Bandeira & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.78

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid.

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid.

This text explicitly states the dialogue and negotiation between the individual and wider world. Whether by accident or design, things accumulate in forming a personality: it is not an essential subject that forms these things around it; it is at least a fifty-fifty relation (and as such presents a degree of balance and harmony).

Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, still from *No Neutral Presentations*, 2011
multiple image slide projection. 3.15mins, looped

3.54 Between the artist and artwork: a further structure of oppositions

This state brings to mind a main theme pursued by Krauss in her *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, considering organising presences in artworks, such as the subjectivity of the artist, forming narrative readings, in conflict with the artwork’s experiencing in real time. Krauss distinguishes between the intentions within random operations of Tristan Tzara and Duchamp.²⁰⁵ Considering Tzara’s formula for composing poetry through the use of chance, she notes that he concludes by stating that the resulting poems will resemble their author. Krauss says ‘This simple assumption on Tzara’s part that the work of art will thereby reflect its maker contradicts the Duchampian position that the connection between object and author be wholly arbitrary’.²⁰⁶

205 R. E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, p.108

206 Ibid.

In later consideration of Oldenburg's sculptures, his making of 'toilets and telephones, or hamburgers and French fries, or cigarette butts',²⁰⁷ Krauss reflects that these objects' 'gigantism and/or softness' promotes 'a sense of interaction in which the viewer is a participant, their mass being construed in terms that suggest his own body – pliant and soft, like flesh. The viewer is then forced into two simultaneous admissions: "They are my things – the objects I use everyday"; and "I resemble them."²⁰⁸

The particular import of this turn-around in Krauss' discussion is the 'concreteness' of the experience that results. The narrative implied by Tzara's organising presence in his poems, she suggests, enables an abstract distancing from Duchamp's more immediate, and therefore less controlled, involvement. The point she drives at here is most clearly stated in relation to Robert Morris' *Column* performance, of 1961, which saw an eight-feet high, plywood, oblong column, standing on a stage for three-and-a-half minutes, suddenly fall and rest on its side for a further three-and-a-half minutes.²⁰⁹ Her discussion centring on this piece concludes that 'regardless of one's own position, or its... meaning arises only from this position, and this perspective; and that one has no knowledge of these things beforehand'.²¹⁰ *Column*'s meaning 'is specific and is a function of lived time.'²¹¹

While these comments of Krauss are illuminating in regard to these works, they again present a difficulty in their Nominalist and phenomenological understanding, which Mackenna and Janssen's use of the line 'you are created by objects as much as you create them' appears to acknowledge, and develop. This is an 'equals' relationship, hinging on an 'as much as', suggesting a balance of oppositions again. Krauss' discounting of Tzara's claim misses the point. There is something significant in the mysterious fact that resemblance still occurs, no matter how much distance the artist might inject into the relation, the state I have earlier considered in regard to Boyle Family's work. And this seems primarily due to the most mundane of reasons, in one sense, or something surprisingly profound in another; of the nature of our everyday surroundings; our space-time. Tzara's first instruction opens this up: 'Take a newspaper' – exact space-time coordinates

207 Ibid., p.229

208 Ibid.

209 Ibid., p.201

210 Ibid., p.240

211 Ibid.

are determined by the manner and outcome of that one action, compounded and made more particular through each successive instruction.²¹² An acceptance of some similar state seems the pertinence in the inclusion of Hippocrates quote; 'Life is short and art long, the crisis fleeting, experience perilous and decision difficult', in one of the vitrines in the exhibition.

Considering where things both do and don't resemble their author, are both inseparable and absolutely separate from a personality, may reflect again on van Doesburg's *Manifesto for Concrete Art*, as a continuing point of reference, and its presenting of a contradictory state, balancing points which seem immediately Realist and Nominalist.

Interrogating this work to decide, once and for all, which it sides with would be to, again, miss the point, when its intention is that through these two sides a perceiving of a more unified state may be enabled, a state which also reflects on what are generally understood as the traditions of Concrete Art: are these quintessentially Modern and Neo-Platonic, in their Geometric Abstraction, or quintessentially Postmodern and Nominalist in their Minimalism? It is interesting that the more assertively monist formulation of Spinoza's philosophy has been similarly questioned in the essay *Spinoza and the Status of Universals*, by Francis Haserot, where this status is judged an essential problem: 'If Spinoza is a nominalist his philosophy is one thing; if he is a realist it is another, and quite different thing... Spinozists are one in name only'.²¹³

3.55 A consistent problem: the questioning of Spinoza's Realist/Nominalist alignment

Haserot discounts a nominalist reading overall, though Spinoza makes various statements which certainly appear nominalist. Such as the example from Scholium to Prop. 40, Part II of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza suggests that our ideas of universal types such as 'man', 'horse', or 'dog' are subjectively formed, through individual experience.²¹⁴ Spinoza says "It is not therefore to be wondered at that so many controversies have arisen amongst philosophers who have endeavoured

212 Ibid., p.105

213 Francis Haserot in S. P. Kashap (Ed), *Studies in Spinoza*, p.43

214 Ibid., pp.50-51

to explain natural objects by the images of things alone.’²¹⁵

Following a thread of nominalist logic Haserot progresses his argument through positions of scepticism, pragmatism, instrumentalism and ultimately positivism, to conclude that if rational knowledge is impossible then the ‘world is made unknowable, metaphysics is reduced to futility, and man, whatever he may be, is and can be guided only by faith or practicality’.²¹⁶ Spinoza, he suggests, is opposed to this at all points: ‘that reality is rational is, for him, axiomatic.’²¹⁷

Here though, he suggests, Spinoza uses the term universal to denote composite images derived by abstraction from inner or outer perception, things coloured by ‘mnemonic blending’, which, as such, can have no ‘ultimate ontological connotations’.²¹⁸

In contrast, he further notes other points where Spinoza employs a Rational universal,²¹⁹ an essence that may be shared by several particulars and recreated indefinitely, for instance, “The definition of a triangle, for example, expresses nothing else than the simple nature of a triangle, but not a certain number of triangles.”²²⁰ In this way there are established ‘true ideas’.²²¹ These ideas are ‘derived from the central laws or principles of nature’ Haserot concludes, ‘A more clear-cut expression of Platonism would be difficult to find.’²²²

And negotiating further nominalist points, such as Spinoza’s moral relativism (that there is no intrinsic good or evil, that “Nero is as good an example of man as anyone”,²²³ which Haserot discounts also by exploring Spinoza’s aim, that man should ultimately be guided by reason²²⁴), he concludes that the philosopher Spinoza is closest to is Plato: ‘so far as the eternity and immutability of the elements of rational universality are concerned, the two philosophies are one’.²²⁵

215 Ibid., p.51
216 Ibid., p.48
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid., p.52
219 Ibid., p.53
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid., p.54
222 Ibid.
223 Ibid., p.61
224 Ibid., p.65
225 Ibid., pp.66-67

But here I would indicate the problematic aspect of Haserot’s discussion, with implications for the rest of this thesis. Spinoza’s Rational universals are the result of the understanding of reality as one ultimate substance,²²⁶ his ‘God or Nature’, a monist identification on which the rest of his philosophy is built; where Haserot’s comments on this substance’s nature, I suggest, bears comparison again with the nature of space: ‘All things have this in common that they are in substance as logical derivatives; they are expressions of substance. And substance commands universality as the common origin of all things.’²²⁷ The point would be made again that, in Spinoza’s view, all things are ultimately one, that there is universality, but that this is immanent, not transcendent.

226 Ibid., p.61
227 Ibid.

4 The Problem of Form

4.1 Outline of the themes of this chapter: considering the limits of the concrete, and the relation of consciousness to the concrete, reflecting on the differentiation of forms within general aesthetic experience

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.¹

If the previous chapter envisaged the world as an immanent unity, implying a unity of some fundamental substance, in some state, this chapter considers what may then be inferred from this sense of unified substance: what are the implications from this unity for our understandings of individual 'forms'? How are individually perceived forms differentiated from the background substance, and what are the further implications for our understandings of differing physical states (i.e. solid, liquid, gas); how are these related to what we might understand as void, or, most pointedly here, the 'immaterial'?

I will reflect on these concerns specifically in relation to understandings of contemporary and Concrete artworks. This consideration foregrounds our aesthetic judgements, as responses to our perceptions of individual forms, as well as a more integrated sense, developed from our wider awareness of our environment; our being accustomed to existing as part of a totality but in which we still experience, through an effect of differentiation, a sense of encounter of individual things.

¹ Georges Bataille, *Formless*, in A. Stoekl (Ed.), *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, p.31

This then is a further presentation, and questioning, of subject/object relations, within a proposed overall unity; a state that suggests our subjectivity as part of a process: our being part, along with all other 'individual' forms, of a general process, the constant transformative nature of which highlights the importance of temporal meaning.

Developing especially from our thinking around exhibitions such as *Concretely Immaterial*, in 2011, 2012's series of shows further explored the relation to the material of consciousness and the conceptual; how individual consciousness may be a part of this process; how Conceptual Art may then also be seen to relate to ideas of Concrete Art; and, from all this, what might then be the implications for understandings of form, and of the 'concrete'. What can 'concrete' mean in relation to a sense of fundamental substance, that perhaps incorporates consciousness, various physical states and even what we may perceive as immaterial? There would certainly seem to be an indication of something more than a mechanistic, and thus deterministic, materiality. And in this there is again an acknowledgement of the immense, possibly infinite, complexity (to refer to Bataille's *Formless*) of 'what is'.

2012's programme thus considered these points under what became a last main heading in our overall programme; *The Problem of Form*, a title taken from a section heading in Rupert Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life*. In this section Sheldrake states the difficulties science has in dealing with form, beyond its few measurable aspects² (a point consistent here also with Bataille's observation of a 'mathematical frock coat'). Sheldrake suggests our understanding of how things form and develop as a vast uncharted territory for science,³ and seeks to explore the potential for a new science that might enable a getting-to-grips with this area.⁴ Where this thesis develops ideas very closely related to some of Sheldrake's, as with much of the basis suggested through the previous chapter, for instance; 'The regularities of nature are not imposed on nature from a transcendent realm, but evolve within the universe',⁵ our interests lead away from the scientific investigations that are then Sheldrake's focus: in this chapter I discuss processes

² R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, pp.73-74

³ Ibid., pp.12-15

⁴ Ibid., p.16

⁵ Ibid., p.4

that appear broadly consistent with Sheldrake's sense of formative causation,⁶ but am concerned with an aesthetic basis to a sense that some form of memory is thus 'inherent in nature', rather than the scientific formulations of morphic resonance, and morphic fields.⁷ Thus rather than what could seem a working in a way to extend this 'frock coat', we have, for reasons that will variously be explored, considered an artistic response as a more appropriate and satisfying means for our concerns, as an immediate involvement in 'what is'. Despite this difference, Sheldrake's heading, and its stating of this problem, still chimed-in especially well with our intentions through this year's exhibitions.

4.2 HICA exhibition: Doug Fishbone: *Neither Here nor There* 1 April – 6 May 2012

4.21 Questioning Conceptual Art's definitions and 'dematerialization'

Doug Fishbone's works might be judged, from within HICA's whole programme, to be the most closely identified with a Conceptual art tradition. His own logo pronounces this alignment, *Doug Fishbone: Conceptual Art*.⁸

Including Fishbone within our programme thus intended to explicitly explore the potential for considering the conceptual as very closely linked to, if not an aspect of, the concrete. How might this be seen to make sense?

While touching on instances of this coupling of the concrete and conceptual previously, with the New Tendencies' focus and the programme of Museum Haus Konstruktiv, paralleling these two through a suggested shared sense of rationality; judging works as the concretisation of presumed rational cognitive capacities, such as with mathematics, and thus presenting a common sense of 'data processing',⁹ I will here instead continue to expand on ideas indicating an alternative identification, so far most clearly articulated by our *Concretely*

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 The Hayward Gallery, *Laughing in a Foreign Language*, p.71

9 M. Rosen (Ed.), *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, A Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973*, p.39

Immaterial exhibition, where rather than this promoting of a common rationality, such things as the virtual and conceptual are alternatively proposed as material in-themselves.

Lucy Lippard's early identification of Conceptual artworks as 'dematerialized' seems still the common-sense notion, where the ideas in the works are 'paramount' and 'the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious...'.¹⁰ Though Lippard herself notes that the term was contested at the outset, with within even the artists her *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* includes, a wide range of opinion on the material status of their work. The majority of those who make comment appear at odds to some extent with Lippard. She also notes¹¹ other 'dematerialized art' not included, for instance, as the "concept art" of Fluxus, Gutai Group, Happenings and Concrete Poetry, groups that, had she included them, might immediately suggest this 'dematerialization' as nonsensical. She notes, again very pertinently for this study, an absence of appropriate terminology:

...since I first wrote on the subject in 1967, it has often been pointed out to me that dematerialization is an inaccurate term, that a piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or as "material", as a ton of lead. Granted. But for lack of a better term I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a de-emphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness).¹²

From the differing opinions she records Joseph Kosuth seems the clearest representative of an intended wholly abstract Conceptual Art, where the work is judged as not experiential¹³ and the development of modern works is from the morphological to the purely mental.¹⁴

Where Robert Barry states the example of a work in the form of a written interview as being only in the minds of the readers; 'The pieces are actual but not concrete; they have a different kind of existence',¹⁵ Lawrence Weiner further suggests that

10 L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.vii

11 Ibid., p.6

12 Ibid., p.5

13 Ibid., p.114

14 Ibid., p.129

15 Ibid., p.113

'...even an idea exists within a certain space.'¹⁶

Art and Language comment directly against this 'dematerialization': '...they may not be an art-object as we know it in its traditional matter-state, but they are nevertheless matter in one of its forms, either solid-state, gas-state, liquid-state.'¹⁷ (Unaware, at the time, of this comment, I have previously made a closely related observation in discussing Camila Sposati's works, which I include later in this chapter.) By this, Art and Language suggest Lippard's adherence to some generally held misconception that as things get less solid they also become less material, by which reckoning things on the scale of our mental powers unquestionably become immaterial. And again, there seems an absence in language to describe such things as anything else. Bourriaud, for example, uses the very clumsy seeming term "social infra-thinness" in describing Gabriel Orozco's working in the 'minute space of daily gestures'.¹⁸ In looking-up 'thinness' in the dictionary, to reflect on its meanings, I noticed just below it the entry for 'thing': 'a material or non-material entity, idea, action, etc., that is or may be thought about or perceived';¹⁹ Lippard's alignment of dematerialization to ideas or actions there, still, officially enshrined in our language. What would it be to overturn this basic and general usage, what would be put in its place?²⁰

Lippard's questioning the general acceptance of the influence of Duchamp on

16 Ibid., p.127

17 Ibid., p.43

18 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.17

19 J. Pearsall & B. Trumble (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, p.1499

20 David Bohm has explored the meaning of the word 'thing', and its relation also to the word 'reality': '..."thing" goes back to various old English words whose significance includes 'object', 'action', 'event', 'condition', 'meeting', and is related to words meaning 'to determine', 'to settle', and, perhaps, to 'time' or 'season'. The original meaning might thus have been 'something occurring at a given time, or under certain conditions'. (Compare to the German 'bedingen', meaning 'to make conditions', or 'to determine', which could perhaps be rendered into English as 'to bething'.) All these meanings indicate that the word 'thing' arose as a highly generalized indication of any form of existence, transitory or permanent, that is limited or determined by conditions. What, then, is the origin of the word 'reality'? This comes from the Latin 'res' which means 'thing'. To be real is to be a 'thing'. 'Reality' in its earlier meaning would then signify 'thinghood in general' or 'the quality of being a thing'. D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, pp.68-69. This may then be a 'highly generalized' indication of 'any form of existence, transitory or permanent', but, I suggest still promotes a sense of something material. It does not seem to tally with a sense of a 'non-material entity'.

the development of Conceptual Art, seeing much more immediate influences in American art, from those such as Reinhardt, Johns, Morris and Ruscha²¹ also serves to sever this development of the conceptual from works which might have much more clearly identifiable connections to material concerns.

Some examples, that she includes, of notably European artists, such as Daniel Buren or Hans Haacke, make this connection and genealogy more apparent.²² Enabling this heritage provides explanation of their methods and reasoning in their production, in a manner that may be judged to have much in common with the various points made in this study, for instance as part of a contemporary dialogue with artists involved in the New Tendencies. Lippard quotes Haacke:

The working premise is to think in terms of systems: the production of systems, the interference with and the exposure of existing systems... Systems can be physical, biological, or social.²³

Or:

A "sculpture" that physically reacts to its environment is no longer to be regarded as an object. The range of outside factors affecting it, as well as its own radius of action, reaches beyond the space it materially occupies. It thus merges with the environment in a relationship that is better understood as a "system" of interdependent processes. These

21 L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.ix

22 Buren's work's relation to Geometric Abstraction might be more obvious, stylistically, especially as a member of the BMPT group, who along with Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni, were 'working with repetition and reduction' (G. Lelong, *Daniel Buren*, p.34) and who, aside Buren and his developing in this period of his repeated canvas-awning stripe motif were painting 'black circles on a white ground', 'wide horizontal bands of colour alternating with the white ground of the support', and 'dabs of paint spaced at more or less regular intervals, also on a white ground' (Ibid.) respectively. Haacke's works developed from within an understanding of an 'abstract pictorial language' (W. Grasskamp, *Hans Haacke*, p.28) absorbed in his student days from the work of his tutors. (Ibid.) He then also met and was influenced by Otto Peine and the Zero Group, in Düsseldorf in 1959, Nouveaux Réaliste artists (noted as Tinguely, Arman and Klein), and encountered the work of Julio Le Parc and François Morellet, from GRAV, in Paris, between 1960 and 1961. (Ibid., p.31)

23 L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.xiii

processes evolve without the viewer's empathy. He becomes a witness. A system is not imagined, it is real.²⁴

Seeing these works in terms of this heritage, the whole effort toward what might be better described as dispersed forms is to reveal the exact opposite of a dematerialization; works that find their own ways to pursue the same trajectory envisaged by van Doesburg. This, for example, presents different contexts for, or possible readings of Robert Barry's title for his inert gas series: *From a Measured Volume to an Indefinite Expansion*;²⁵ an undermining of a Modernist sense of measure (equal perhaps, in this discussion, with Bellingham's), or a direct involvement in real space and thus a prompt to a unified sense of art and life?

Robert Barry, *Inert Gas Series: Argon; From a Measured Volume to Indefinite Expansion*, 1969

²⁴ Ibid., p.37. Again the influence of GRAV is notable here, 'their analytical and geometrical clarity' which 'made even the Zero Group's cool art-design seem romantic, still committed to ideals that heroized the artist'... (W. Grasskamp, *Hans Haacke*, p.31) That 'Haacke was fascinated by the way in which GRAV undermined any sense of artistic mystification, reducing art to rational and geometric elements and random procedures, as in the work of François Morellet, or on the laws of visual perception, like in the work of Julio Le Parc' (Ibid.) provides much clearer explanation of his development from early geometric abstract painting to works which analyse systems, and which then develop into forms such as 'institutional critique'.

²⁵ L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.95

4.22 Fishbone's alignment: degrees of conceptual content, and the means of its location

Barry's 'conceptual' is perhaps clearly physically oriented, where Doug Fishbone's more apparent psychological focus may present a greater seeming divergence here from the concrete, in a discussion of a 'general' identification of a Conceptual Art. Out of the works mentioned by Lippard, Douglas Huebler's seem a good comparison for some of Fishbone's, with Huebler's *Duration Piece #14*, of 1970, photos of a small group of participants taken after their seeing emotive and contradictory pairings of words,²⁶ a very close match formally for Fishbone's *Untitled (Hypno project)*, one of the two main pieces in his show at HICA.

Doug Fishbone, stills from *Untitled (Hypno Project)*, 2009

²⁶ Ibid., p.120

In this work of Fishbone’s, a small group under the influence of hypnosis watch a short video, responding to certain visual and aural cues, as Fishbone gives one of his trademark ‘cack-handed slide shows or corporate PowerPoint presentations’,²⁷ a slightly manic and humorous lecture similarly probing responses to the emotive, unsettling and contradictory. Our own responses are paralleled to those of the hypnotized audience, as we observe both their responses and the presentation.

The other core element in the show was Fishbone’s feature-length melodrama, *Elmina*, projected within HICA’s main gallery space as if in a small cinema: ‘shot in Ghana with a cast of major Ghanaian celebrities and scripted by a leading local production team’²⁸ *Elmina* makes thematic connection to the *Hypno project*, offering;

an unexpected hybrid of the contemporary art world and the West African popular film industry. What allows it to cross over is the presence of Fishbone, a white man [and more pointedly, a white conceptual artist] from New York, in the lead of an otherwise completely African film – a part that would normally be played by a black West African actor. No reference is made to this oddity of casting...²⁹

Elmina was ‘Released as both a limited edition art work for a Western art-world audience and an inexpensive DVD for mainstream African and African immigrant markets...’³⁰

Fishbone suggests these works raise questions about such things as ‘manipulation, propaganda and behavioral conditioning in our media-saturated visual and political environment.’ and ‘...quietly [challenge] conventions of race and representation in film’ respectively.³¹

Here I would reflect again on Norman Bryson’s comments regarding Manet’s *Olympia*; that the ‘power’ of this work is not in its direct influencing of attitudes toward particular issues, but its perhaps minute operations in ‘local moments

27 The Hayward Gallery, *Laughing in a Foreign Language*, p.68
28 See the exhibition’s press release; Appendix A
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.

of change’, its shifting of the ‘discursive flow’. And Fishbone appears equally aware of this; that his stated concerns are in some way to tick a box for content, which allows the more significant intentions of the work to more subtly question the means and manner of engagement of the discursive flow. As he goes on to suggest, they present ‘the possibility that a given work can operate on a number of different levels simultaneously – depending on who views and in what context’.³²

Doug Fishbone, *Elmina* film poster, 2010

Fishbone appears also aware that it is the precise form of these pieces that then makes them ‘work’ within the terms of this ‘discursive’ engagement. His judging of form in his lecture’s delivery, for example, seems comparable to the presentation of sound-poetry that I have previously discussed: emphasising his manner and

32 Ibid.

bearing, what he feels able to voice, and when he knows he is pushing boundaries; encountering unease, has the audience's attention and so on.

In the judging of these things then, there appear reference points that he is able to trust, necessary to develop each work, and a body of work. While perhaps always difficult, negotiating and navigating a very wide array of variables, that this can be done, and successfully satisfy intentions, betrays much more reliable coordination than the deep scepticism Fishbone expresses in the works themselves.³³ The presence of this focus is also demonstrated by the real point of interest for both Fishbone and ourselves in presenting the exhibition; very much on the level of the works' engagement of the 'discursive flow', rather than the exploring of any particular sense to do with the more identifiable 'conceptual' issues he raises.

On this Fishbone comments:

Elmina has generally been shown in much more urban institutions, and in cities where there is a sizeable West African presence, like London, Amsterdam, or Berlin. So it was great to have it circulate outside those channels at HICA, as it may have been particularly strange for an audience to come across it there. In Ghana, I am hoping it will one day be screened in the informal cinema parlours that exist in more remote parts of the countryside – places where people pay a small fee to watch

33 Here it seems relevant to note that Renfrew has explored the development of what seem complex, abstract, and culturally specific notions of such things as 'weight' (C. Renfrew, *Prehistory: Making of the Human Mind*, p.117) and 'value' (Ibid. pp.118-122) from processes of material engagement. Each example, he considers, relies on experiential involvement; "weight" must first have been apprehended through physical experience' for example (Ibid., p.117) and '...while the notion of "value" may be a mental construct, originating in the brain, it cannot come about without considerable experience of the natural world and knowledge of the properties of different materials...'. (Ibid., p.122) Considering these things' symbolic operations then, in their particular cultural settings, he concludes that asking what they are symbols of forms the realisation that they '...symbolise and quantify an inherent property'. 'If you have such a symbolic relationship, the stone "weight" has to relate to some property that exists out there in the real world. In a sense these stone cubes serving as weights are symbolic of themselves: weight as a symbol of weight. It may be appropriate here to use the term constitutive symbol, where the symbolic or cognitive elements and the material element co-exist. The one does not make sense without the other'. (Ibid., p.117) These examples propose our various culturally constructed notions as being still immediately reliant on some experiential understanding of materiality.

bootleg DVDs on a monitor, or projected on a screen, with simple seating. The HICA location felt somehow closer to that model, without trying to push the similarity too far.³⁴

Doug Fishbone, stills from *Elmina*, 2010

Otherwise, within the works, and directing his scepticism at our current belief systems, he compares these to those of the past that are now outmoded and seem in some way crude, confused or freakish, or to those of today that seem equally 'out there'. He further exposes doubt by considering our generally arbitrary seeming interpretations of the 'real', such as the examples he gives of our human languages' differing words for the same noises made by, for instance, dogs or frogs.³⁵ If he is seeking to make comment on particular issues, he does

34 HICA, *Exhibitions 2012*, p.10

35 Ibid. p.12

this through debunking the whole notion of reliable theory, suggesting instead ‘maybe it’s impossible to know anything with any certainty at all?’³⁶ The targets of this undermining are quite clearly our conceptual certainties.

Here, in the light of Fishbone’s works and their more pointed ‘conceptual’ identification I will reflect again on various points and positions explored previously.

Considering again the schema presented through the example of Polak and van Bakkum’s works indicates Fishbone’s focus on the ‘maps’ we navigate by, showing up their dubious, if not frequently absurd nature. But to reflect on points variously made at the end of the last chapter, there equally develops through this a questioning of exactly where the divisions are between our sense of map and territory?

There is a much more complex relation here, in-keeping with Fishbone’s apparent awareness, and Bryson’s comments, that artworks engage the discursive flow through their material form (whatever form that might take).

While pursuing the absurdities of our feeling in some ways as ‘brains in vats’ Fishbone also states that he is not so relativist as to deny the reality of all things³⁷ his works, perhaps contrarily in the end, pointing to what otherwise gives some sense of bearings. That is, the ‘alternate zone of consciousness’ his works indicate is something much more physically oriented and integrated, through their means and methods such as hypnosis (as a presumed less conscious state). His artworks blur then the sense that our conscious selves are purely concerned with the ‘map’ and our bodies exist entirely within the realm of ‘territory’. There is something much more ‘composite’ under consideration through his ‘different levels’ of understanding, something which seems to sit happily with a reflection on the incorporation of ‘collective subjectivities’³⁸ or on how our own subjectivity ‘spills considerably beyond the limits of the individual’,³⁹ as with Bourriaud’s earlier discussion of Guattari.

Here then, what may have been presumed as non-material is tied-in to material

36 The Hayward Gallery, *Laughing in a Foreign Language*, p.71

37 HICA, *Exhibitions 2012*, p.12

38 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp.91-92

39 Ibid., p.90

facts beyond our physical limits. The role of the works as ‘subjectivity as production’,⁴⁰ their taking part in a ‘process of non-verbal semiotization’⁴¹ further touches on reasons why an artistic response here may be more apt than a scientific one; artworks are things that knowingly partake in the actual in this way. They are aware that they stand inside the relation rather than maintain an illusion of being outside. Van Doesburg puts this difference well, for instance, saying that artists do not write about art, they write from within it.⁴²

Our language may, by this reckoning, not be a ‘bad translation’ of the real, from some position standing outside, but a necessarily different form within it. What would it be to be an exact replication, from some external position: exactly which dog, which frog should be mimicked, or would everything be uniquely replicated in every instance? Road signs would not function as they do, if they showed images of individual hazards: ‘this deer, at this point, will run across the road...’ (though we can be sure that someone is working on it...), or weather maps function as depictions of conditions in each and every location. These things appear as the facts of our human ‘subjectivity as production’, necessarily requiring some level of ‘symbolic’ language, while remaining still as objects in, formed from and part of, the world.

Indeed the inaccuracy of our ‘maps’ may then be suggested as required, adapting our necessarily generalised language to fit current needs, aware that these are constantly changing. Fishbone’s debunking contrarily reveals this as a necessarily imperfect, constantly developing process.

4.23 Our unwitting involvements within a bigger picture

These ‘productions’ and various behaviours, interacting with and shaping our world range then from those we may feel we are fully conscious of, to those that are unwitting side-effects; the points that Fishbone’s works appear to ultimately intend focus on.⁴³ In discussion with Fishbone for instance, I had recalled a Nature programme on TV, some years ago, that suggested that termites both

40 Ibid., p.88

41 Ibid.

42 T. van Doesburg, *Principles of Neo-Plastic Art*, p.5

43 HICA, *Exhibitions 2012*, pp.10-11

shape their own ‘cultures’, their own worlds within the bounds of their nests and territories, and play a significant role in regulating the Earth’s atmosphere through the quantities of methane they, collectively, produce. Whales, apparently, also have a significant role here: by consuming the vast amounts of krill that they do, they regulate krill numbers and the krill’s contributions to greenhouse gases.⁴⁴ Fishbone equally related fascination with such phenomena, commenting on such things as the worst traffic jams being caused by everyone leaving early to beat the traffic.⁴⁵ These kinds of examples wonder at how our chaotic individual existences unknowingly fit into larger patterns, at how our ‘countless daily individual actions’⁴⁶ form more organised structures; a relation that implies the opposite of a clear and distinct consciousness as a ‘conceptual’ and knowing self, and something instead profoundly concerned with and involved in concrete conditions.

4.3 HICA exhibition: Eloi Puig:
Simultaneous Translation/Traducció Simultània
8 July – 12 August 2012

4.31 Concurrent relations and forms of translation

Eloi Puig’s works, seemingly very different to Fishbone’s, share an equal focus and, in this, present broadly the same conclusions. He, for instance, ‘...considers whether language, and art, through their conceptual separation from reality, unavoidably manipulate “fact”’.⁴⁷ To do this his works have drawn ‘...parallels between human bodies and minds, and the physical components of computers and the virtual states they create’.⁴⁸ Presenting ways in which the ‘language’ of computers may be paralleled to that of human language, in its separation, his past works have created such things as corrupted computer data to be endlessly repeated, or randomly generating computer programs with no input possible from

⁴⁴ An example of a report on this kind of effect can be found at S. Wiseman, *Could termites be the world’s terminators?: A humble forest insect may be emitting dangerous amounts of methane*. [Online]

⁴⁵ HICA, *Exhibitions 2012*, p.11

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See the exhibition’s press release, Appendix A

⁴⁸ Ibid.

the user.⁴⁹ At times, also through performance-presentations, his works have similarly explored doubt; in his case specifically between the real and the fake, in regard to such diverse sources as Jorge Luis Borges, the Moon landings and the pop group Milli Vanilli.⁵⁰ As a member of the Imarte research group he has more recently worked alongside science researchers at Barcelona’s Supercomputing Centre engaged in decoding DNA,⁵¹ applying their methods of sequence alignment to text,⁵² procedures in-keeping with the more technical and scientific appearance of his works, and approach.

His show at HICA purposefully took the form of a dialogue presenting an equivalent sense of ‘translation’ between map and territory; the (possibly ‘fake’) conceptual and the (‘real’) physical. Making connections, some live and online, between HICA and Hangar, a centre for arts production and research in Barcelona, the city in which Puig lives and works, he extended these ideas of separation and translation to reflect on understandings of art and science;⁵³ the sense of their relation, as perhaps again a presumed ‘intuitive’ and ‘fake’, compared to a ‘rational’ and ‘real’.

In the form of the show he made explicit a sense of concurrency.⁵⁴ As with its title, *Simultaneous Translation/Traducció Simultània*, the show explored how others’ lives may always be difficult to understand as on-going in some way, others’ narratives always disruptive of our own,⁵⁵ while suggesting that their consideration also always enables a gaining of perspective. By extension, this may then imply a different kind of relation between our conceptual selves and the physical world: a concurrent awareness forces an understanding of our being ‘within’ a relation, rather than standing outside. That is, while there may be a necessary illusion of separation, our maps exist in and as part of the territory. Returning to the problems of perspective images; our literal standing outside of these may replicate this illusion of consciousness. Thus, while perhaps having understandable origins, they, in this way, remain deeply problematic.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See for instance Imarte (2014) *MetaMethods* [Online] for details

⁵² methods detailed in E. Puig, (2014), E-mail: *Re: DNA project information?*, Puig includes notes on current research: *Art In Silico: New Uses of the Sequences Alignments on the Textualitie’s Boundaries*, personal e-mail to the author

⁵³ See the exhibition’s press release, Appendix A

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Perspective images, by this, negate the potential for gaining actual perspective; the seeing of things from some other point of view. Seeing things as concurrent on the other hand, provides an essential ethical step; the most basic lesson in ethical, actual, perspective appearing the simple relational geometry of the ‘Golden Rule’: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.⁵⁶ Timothy Morton observes, ‘Seeing yourself from another point of view is the beginning of ethics and politics.’⁵⁷ Opposing this promotion of empathy through a sense of concurrency perspective images are in some way psychopathic.

Eloi Puig, *Geolocation Reading*
Action, via the internet, between HICA and Hangar, Barcelona

Via the internet, Puig enacted a communication and translation of texts between HICA and those collaborating in the performance at Hangar. The show contained other comparisons of texts and images, variously encoded,

56 ‘known as the Golden Rule this page demonstrates how this “ethic of reciprocity”, that “One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself” is basic to most philosophies and world religions.’ From *The Golden Rule* [Online]
57 T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p.14

transmitted and deciphered: each location’s weather determining the direction of lines superimposed onto a live map; images of each space’s interior, exterior and wider location, analysed for their constituent colours as a code for their geography; poems relating to each location analysed by the same computer programs as used to analyse DNA. Puig then presented these as equivalents to ‘data sequences’, as ‘the source materials’ “DNA”’,⁵⁸ the analysis of which further enabled ‘...a comparison of place as sequence alignment, following the scientific methods of bioinformatics and computational genomics.’⁵⁹

Eloi Puig, *fINE- lINe bE-twEen HicA -And- HangAr*
lINEa fINa -EnTrE-- H--AngAr i Hic-A-
on-line, project on url: <http://www.eloipuig.com/hicahangar>

Eloi Puig, *Series Geo-Colour: ext-hangar, ext-hica*, from 6 piece series in DinA3, 2012

58 See the exhibition press release, Appendix A
59 Ibid.

4.32 Understanding form as content: overlapping contents of 'dispersed' forms: composite entities and environmental meanings

Fundamentally, this comparison, exploring the reality of concurrency as something disruptive to our personal narratives, and our narratives of place, provides ways of seeing and understanding the source materials as equally material form and information. The exhibition, in then offering the results as artworks, as forms for our interpretation, also appears consistent with Fishbone's ultimate intentions: the works do not make a scientific communication, or comment specifically on any 'issue' in-themselves, but through their form as artworks consider their involvements with the 'discursive flow'.

We had had some small dialogue with Puig over a number of years, though it was not until we invited him to contribute to the *Concretely Immaterial* exhibition that we directly discussed ideas of Concrete Art. It seems pertinent to note in this discussion that up until that point he had not been aware of the term or its history. He subsequently saw how applicable ideas of Concrete Art were for his own work. While, for HICA, this has not been an uncommon occurrence, in this circumstance it appeared particularly demonstrative of a sense of being in-tune with things without conscious awareness; some example of a unity of theory and practice, of more basic ways we 'pick up on things' through their consideration as matter; an understanding of 'information' from this; suggesting proof of our negotiating the world via form and its 'intellect' rather than through just theory (which might only inform on the proper, conventional, terminology).

Perhaps also here this more 'intuitive' response to things in the world can be especially related to the particular phenomena of concurrent developments of direction; an immersion in the current 'state of the world' (as discussed with Boyle Family, previously) that may provide explanation for other spontaneous concurrent developments; that of Darwin and Wallace being perhaps a classic example.⁶⁰ It proposes that if, as with Pape's earlier comment, 'artists can sense something that is nascent in the air, emerging, invading, and altering life-space...' ⁶¹ then this is due to the actual shape of that life-space, something physically shaping the environment.

⁶⁰ See J. W. Burrow's comment in his Introduction to C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p.34, for instance.

⁶¹ See section 2.87

As with the *Concretely Immaterial* exhibition, Puig's show incorporated this awareness of concurrency, our immersion in others' narratives and the show's own narratives, as some form of composite entity in-itself, variously extending the sense of these through the employing of technology. Alongside this awareness though, Puig still paralleled the operations of our minds with the workings of computers as a mundane instance of the 'separation' we may still, perhaps necessarily, experience. Suggesting previously an acceptance of our conceptual separation from the world, our reading-in to material forms for example, as not a problem for concrete works but a necessary function, certainly suggests the 'conceptual' as a 'different' space. But if, also through previous discussion of immanence, this is not in any way 'outside' of the physical world, then where does it reside? Morton has asked 'What if consciousness were not "higher" but "lower" than we ever supposed?'⁶² And here the metaphor employed by Puig perhaps suggests our consciousness as just the interactions of so many microcircuits.

In one way though, by making these works as if they were scientific research into DNA, then offering the uncertain results up to our interpretation, he suggests that, beyond any mechanistic process of inheritance, we are also products of our environment (these works are reliant on our more open and 'environmental' interpretations, for example, instead of on a purely objective and mechanical communication). For Puig the sensitivity to environmental influence is such that a change in context suggests a possible substantial change to a form; it's different constitution consequently resulting in its different 'DNA':⁶³ we instantly become an intrinsic part of our immediate environment; incorporated into it through our physical presence and all the processes of living. But awareness of this immediate relation is matched by an expanded sense of cosmopolitanism, of knowledge of how all others form part of their locations; an again 'think global, act local'.

Eloi Puig, *ReNgA word- m-Ap, hIcA RoNdAlIa De l'AssimIla* book in DinA3, (detail) 2012

⁶² T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p.72

⁶³ HICA, *Exhibitions 2012*, p.21

4.33 More closely identifying two observed processes here:

I aim here then to more clearly identify two closely-connected processes, that have been variously touched on, and which are key in what has so far been discussed - a clearer view of these may enable further conclusions.

The first process seeks to describe the manner in which our interactions emanate out, through our simply existing as part of an environment, or through more specific interactions, such as the production of artworks, to become part of the 'shape' of our surroundings. This also includes all extended means of interaction as well: through technological means, or through the production of 'ideas', to incorporate all, what I have termed, 'dispersed' forms. (Noting that through this dispersal forms also inevitably take-on some of the characteristics of their new surroundings, as suggested above, and as such imply a constant process between all such effects, on-going within any general environment.)

The second of these seeks to reflect the sense of adaptation to our immediate location, through something that operates, as Augusto de Campos quotes Apollinaire, 'synthetically-ideographically instead of analytically-discursively':⁶⁴ suggestive of an immediate response to the 'matter and information' of form, again a response which relates to both large scale 'concentrated' forms, as well as all other scales present within an environment; all physical form, all kinds of 'dispersed' forms, forms of behaviour, and so on.

4.331 The Phenotypical

Firstly then, is a sense of pervading influence. Morton reflects on the 'ambience' of artworks, as a surrounding quality that he extends through comparison to the phenomena of phenotypes in biology,⁶⁵ noting that in this same way Julia Kristeva has 'explored the relationship between the "genotext" and the "phenotext"', leading Morton to suggest that we 'could argue that ambience was the "extended

64 Quoted in H.U. Obrist, (2003) *Interview with Augusto de Campos*, p.96

65 T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p.103. For a definition of 'phenotype' see J. Pearsall & B. Trumble (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, p.1089: the 'set of observable characteristics of an individual or group, resulting from the interaction of its genotype with its environment'.

phenotext". This is appropriate, since the genotext includes the ecosystem'.⁶⁶ Thus the manner of emanation of influence may be presented as equivalent to this biological relation between an organism and its environment. This points to a more particular sense of 'things-words' being *in* 'space-time', where 'in' now appears an absolutely symbiotic overlapping, or merging into, of each other. Morton describes this as 'ecological': 'seen like this, all texts – all artworks, indeed – have an irreducibly ecological form.'⁶⁷ And this sense forms the basis of his 'Ecological Thought'; opposed to what he suggests is an illusory notion of a unified individual form, distinct from its surroundings.⁶⁸

Colin Renfrew also observes:

The mind works through the body. To localise it exclusively within the brain is not strictly correct....The blind man with the stick apprehends the world more effectively with the stick than without. The draughtsman thinks through the pencil. The potter at the wheel constructs the pot through a complex process that resides not only in the brain, but in the hands and the rest of the body and in those useful extensions of the body, the turntable and, indeed, the clay itself. In each of these cases, the experience of undertaking a purposive and intelligent action extends beyond the individual human body, and well beyond the individual brain. We can speak of an extended mind.

Furthermore, the intention, when we undertake a purposive action, is not always simply the product of a single individual. It can be shared. [The]...principle that a new outcome can be the result of collective rather than individual action or intention arises in many instances of group behaviour.⁶⁹

Renfrew concludes here that, rather than aiming to closer define 'mind', it may be more profitable to focus on the (human) actions in which it has an active role; the 'processes of material engagement'... 'Here it may be possible to speak of a

66 T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, note 15, pp.153-154

67 Ibid., p.11

68 Ibid., p.4

69 C. Renfrew, *Prehistory: Making of the Human Mind*, pp.119-120

distributed mind.⁷⁰

Bohm further states, that 'thought is a real activity, which has to be grounded in a broader totality of real movement and action that overlaps and includes thought.'⁷¹ Thus '...all man-made features of our general environment are, in this sense, extensions of the process of thought, for their shapes, forms, and general orders of movement originate basically in thought, and are incorporated within this environment...' this is then a feedback process, flowing between thought and environment;

...content that was originally in memory continually passes into and becomes an integral feature of the environment, whole content that was originally in the environment passes into and becomes an integral feature of memory, so that... the two participate in a single total process... in which thought... and the general environment are indissolubly linked...⁷²

4.332 The encountering of forms as totalities

The second of the two processes I aim to better identify here relates to our responses to forms as we encounter and perceive them; as separate and individual totalities, even in the knowledge of the above pervading effects.

These perceptions of 'totalities', our common encounters with things, by which we navigate through the vast majority of our lives, could suggest Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as a significant consideration here.⁷³ His rejection of both Rationalist and Empiricist attempts to gain objective knowledge of things in the world,⁷⁴ in favour of a focus on our response to forms in our experience⁷⁵ would certainly seem in sympathy here. But, while he considers our perceptions

70 Ibid., p.120

71 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.74

72 Ibid.

73 See for instance his discussion of perceptions of ordinary objects and surroundings in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.68

74 Ibid., p.6. His discussion of the Müller-Lyer optical illusion is an early presentation of this intention, in his argument.

75 Ibid., for example, see p.26

as resulting from our immersion in the physical world,⁷⁶ as a phenomenological approach extended through all our senses and awareness his seems still an inevitable presentation to an (all too easily just human) individually perceiving consciousness, limiting the potential for things of the order of the wider phenotypical involvements, proposed above, and suggesting a giving up of any understanding of reality to what is purely subjective.⁷⁷ To illustrate the distinction here I would reflect on Sheldrake's discussion of the differing ways that science and mathematics may be understood to relate to the world they describe. Sheldrake suggests one view to be that

...correspondence can be explained by the tendency of the mind to seek and find order in experience: the ordered structures of mathematics, creations of the human mind, are superimposed onto experience, and those that do not fit are discarded... In this view, scientific activity is concerned only with the development and empirical testing of mathematical models of more or less isolated and definable aspects of the world; it cannot lead to any fundamental understanding of reality.⁷⁸

The giving up of any sense of 'fundamental' engagement and connection between the conception and reality that this view, similarly focussing on our human perceptions, presents, seems to necessitate a different route for this inquiry.

4.34 The aesthetic negotiation of the world, and a route to its understanding

Here, as noted at the start of this chapter, Rupert Sheldrake's reflections on the *Problem of Form*, an example of an approach seeking means of still engaging with external reality, while also negotiating the difficulties presented by this same sense of need for rational knowledge, perhaps offers a more useful route for this study, via his focus on physics, and his equal awareness of the inadequacy of these 'rational' means. He notes, for instance, that the immense complexity and

76 Ibid. See chapters generally exploring sense experience through our bodily incarnation, and through this, our relationship with the world.

77 The importance of this distinction becomes evident in, for example, my later consideration of the *Neo-Concrete Manifesto*, see section 4.53

78 R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, pp.76-77

ever-shifting morphology of ‘all but the simplest systems’ (referring to forms such as those of molecules) are something that mathematics simply cannot represent.⁷⁹ There is an inevitable vast gulf between mathematical understandings, reliant on expressing the ‘quantitative factors’ that physics is concerned with, and our experience of form.⁸⁰ This state may particularly recall Bataille’s *Formless*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, where for academic men [sic] mathematics is the means for the universe to take shape, though this is only ever a ‘frock coat to what is’. Sheldrake notes, regarding what Bataille designates as formless, that forms are ‘simply themselves’, they ‘cannot be reduced to anything else’. As such they can only be recognized directly, and, very significantly here, can only be represented visually.⁸¹

Thus discounting this accounting for form through number, as well as Plato’s accounting for form through more fundamental Forms (due to their transcendent natures and relation to Pythagorean mysticism⁸²), Sheldrake reflects that Aristotle resolved these difficulties through a notion of immanent forms: ‘specific forms were inherent in the souls of living beings and actually caused them to take up their characteristic forms.’⁸³ He further states, ‘The morphogenetic fields and chreodes of organismic biologists play a similar role in guiding morphogenetic processes towards specific final forms.’⁸⁴

This, and related ideas, will be returned to at a later point. Here I wish just to comment on the nature of Sheldrake’s account. He suggests our day-to-day experience as responses to the perceived totalities of forms, implying our navigating of the world as a flying blind in terms of ‘rational’ calculating. Instead, our means of negotiating this world of constantly shifting forms is highlighted as the simply and generally aesthetic.⁸⁵

Morton reflects on the importance of constant aesthetic judgements in our (and other creatures) navigating the world,⁸⁶ stating that Darwin saw these kinds

79 Ibid., p.74
80 Ibid., pp.73-74
81 Ibid., p.74
82 Ibid., p.77
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., p.74
86 T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, pp.70-71

of judgements, for instance, as highly significant in the processes of sexual selection. In Darwin’s observations forms have evolved in ways to embody their ‘information’; the beauty of birds’ plumage, for example.⁸⁷

If form does embody intellect, or information, subjectively interpretable by those that encounter it, then this presents an answer to a question that has thus far provided a focus for this study: in this way things may be understood as being, in Gan’s terms, ‘materialistically intelligible’. This reflects a sense of unity of mind and matter, as with Spinoza’s monism; we encounter forms as we encounter their ‘thought’, going beyond a state of the medium as just message, to a point where the medium itself has a point of view. That is, in the way of Serge Daney’s earlier quoted comment, ‘all form is a face, looking at us’:⁸⁸ things ‘look at’, or encounter, us. Forms are not just the inert scenery in our individual narrative, but concurrent with us in a multiple process.

4.35 Consequent, further considerations of the relation of consciousness and the physical

Here then a consequent questioning of the relationship of consciousness to the physical is made more possible.

As noted previously, Spinoza considered reality as understandable as either Thought or Extension:

We can study an animal’s behaviour as explained by its appetites and expectations (‘It wants its mate and expects to find it here’) or as explained by physical causes (‘There was a chemical reaction which started the movement of muscles.’)... They each equally represent the common order of nature, but we must not in our minds mix and confuse the two necessarily distinct orders of causes.⁸⁹

This distinction may be made unnecessary though by the understanding of

87 Ibid., p.70
88 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.21]
89 From Stuart Hampshire’s Introduction, B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.ix

Thought as a purely physical phenomenon, in some way just another form within Extension: as Bohm states, a real activity, grounded in a broader totality.⁹⁰ For one example of exploration of this potential, Jim Al-Khalili describes Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff's research, that may explain consciousness as a purely physical phenomenon:

... they appeal to quantum mechanics as they believe that the way we 'think' is fundamentally unlike the way a computer carries out algorithmic processes. This non-computability of conscious thought, they maintain, must require something beyond classical physics – namely quantum physics.⁹¹

This consideration is especially relevant then to the discussion of the metaphor employed by Puig, suggesting our consciousness as just the interactions of so many microcircuits. Though by employing this metaphor in making artworks, it would seem most likely that Puig is implying the opposite, and is in some agreement with this 'non-computability', in again exploring the differences between 'rational' science and 'intuitive' art.

While this physical explanation would avoid the need for Spinoza's distinction, and in this way enable a perhaps more simply physical, monist understanding, it does appear, despite the quantum nature of the processes suggested, and perhaps the incorporating of the feedback processes discussed by Bohm, to suggest the site of consciousness again as just in 'brains'. Spinoza's sense of Thought extends across reality, and is a function of the way that we perceive infinite substance, through our surroundings. Thus, for Spinoza, we may think of 'Nature as a whole' as either Thought or Extension.⁹²

A further possibility then appears, perhaps some way between these, presenting a final point to consider in regard to this discussion in the light of Puig's works. Timothy Morton suggests our possible '...blindness to the lowly simplicity of consciousness',⁹³ which comment, extended by Morton to all creatures and to a sense from their extended phenotype, suggests our encountering of the 'intellect'

90 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.74

91 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.258

92 B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.viii

93 T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p.73

of things as possibly equally encountering their 'consciousness'.⁹⁴ Consciousness as not a separate way of seeing reality, nor limited just to particular 'grey matter', but pervasive, and experienced through our constant aesthetic judgements in negotiating the world.

This state will be further considered. I would note here though that what Puig appears to be proposing, through forms subjected to analysis as if they were DNA, then presented as artworks, is a sense that while science may be able to make speculation in other areas redundant (what if, for instance, a thorough scientific explanation of consciousness was achieved?), and may then seem of primary importance, the limits to scientific explanations appear equally significant and, contrarily, highlight the pervading importance of aesthetic understanding.

4.4 HICA exhibition: Daniel Spoerri: *Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri* 2 September – 7 October 2012

4.41 To confront the material, and to 'un-trick' the eye: the practical and our constant immersion in profoundly qualified space

These several points made in connection with Puig's exhibition, considered together, provide a point of reflection again on art's procedures in relation to science. These again, I suggest, propose the developing of relational engagements with form to enable 'reasoned' judgements, to gain perspective from an immanent position.

Daniel Spoerri's works seem an especially good example here in taking this consideration forward, looking at everyday formations from a vantage point that is in some way engineered; a positioning as response, through aesthetic judgments.

Spoerri is best known for his 'snare' pictures, which he began making in 1959:⁹⁵ 'Snare-picture: objects found in chance positions, in order or disorder (on tables, in boxes, drawers etc.) are fixed ("snared") as they are.'⁹⁶ These works present

94 Ibid., pp.70-71

95 See the exhibition's press release, Appendix A

96 D. Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, p.181

groups of objects, such as all the remains of a meal, fixed exactly as they are found, on the surface they lie. The assemblages are then displayed on the wall as pictures: “gluing together situations that have happened accidentally so that they stay together permanently”.⁹⁷

saying, ‘this magazine requires a clear and precise confrontation with the material it offers...’¹⁰⁰ Taking their cue from Gomringer they state some of the works as ‘constellations’, and others as ‘ideograms’ presented typographically: ‘Gomringer informs us: the concrete poet creates the game, the reader plays it.’¹⁰¹ This state of encounter then remains basic to Spoerri’s work.¹⁰²

Daniel Spoerri, *Restaurant de la Galerie J, Paris*, 1962

For the couple of years before his first snare-pictures, from 1957-59, Spoerri, in collaboration with Claus Bremer, produced the concrete poetry magazine *Material*.⁹⁸ The first issue of *Material* is also widely considered the first international anthology of concrete poetry.⁹⁹ Spoerri and Bremer introduce the magazine,

97 See the exhibition’s press release, Appendix A
98 D. Spoerri, *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, p.112
99 Noted for instance, in E. Williams (Ed.), *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, p.vi

Daniel Spoerri, *Konkrete Poesie*, 1956

The close dialogue maintained between Spoerri and Karl Gerstner, throughout their careers, indicates Spoerri’s continued working around a sense of a Concrete art, in this way. Where Spoerri notes in the *Topography of Chance*, referring to

100 D. Spoerri, *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, p.113
101 Ibid.
102 See for instance Spoerri and Tinguely’s *Autotheatre* of 1961; ‘The stage of the dynamic theatre creates the game, the spectator plays it’. Ibid., p.88

Gerstner's book on Concrete Art, *Cold Art* (Kalte Kunst), that 'some like it hot',¹⁰³ he acknowledges his opposite methodologies employed to explore the same areas. Gerstner has commented,

Works by Mondrian and Vantongerloo look very similar, even if the artists' most essential concerns were diametrically opposed to one another. With me and Spoerri, it's exactly the other way around. God knows how different our works always look! But rather than categorical, the contrasts in fact are complementary. Our works complete one another.¹⁰⁴

There is again here then the idea of games with 'concrete' rules, simple systems promoting purposeful reasoning in response to concrete circumstances; the negotiating of the plastic meaning of forms.

David Summers also discusses the development of games through the spatial character of the forms employed.¹⁰⁵ (His consideration is of forms in art, though he reflects on children's games in light of a discussion of Gombrich's *Meditations on a Hobby-Horse*.) In these games it is the practical, the forms' being able to be employed in certain ways, such as the way a stick may be 'ridden', that determines their usage.¹⁰⁶ Summers says, 'Practically any object could be used for it, the stress being on the word "practically", because only manageable objects – the stress here falling on the root man-, as in manus, hand – could be substitutes and thus become part of the game.'¹⁰⁷

Haserot's criticism of a nominalistic reading of Spinoza discounts the potential of the 'practical': the 'world is made unknowable, metaphysics is reduced to futility, and man, whatever he may be, is and can be guided only by faith or practicality'.¹⁰⁸ But if the simple and practical, the immanent conditions, dictate what is allowable, what is possible, as with the observation of 'concrete rules', then both the setting and the objects employed are in these ways expressions of universality, of spatial character. As constant and immersive environment,

103 D. Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, p.206

104 D. Spoerri, *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, p.103

105 In *Real Metaphor*, N. Bryson, M. A. Holly & K. Moxey (Eds.) *Visual Theory*, especially pp.242-245

106 Ibid., See for instance his comments on p.250

107 Ibid., p.244

108 In S. P. Kashap (Ed), *Studies in Spinoza*, p.48

as Summers also stresses,¹⁰⁹ which may now be suggested to communicate 'thought', or at least 'information', the practical would appear here as a significant mechanism by which the 'rationality of reality', that which Haserot suggests for Spinoza is axiomatic,¹¹⁰ may be grasped. That is, our everyday existence is within an inescapably and profoundly qualified space, informing and coordinating our experience.

Daniel Spoerri, objects from Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri, selected for HICA

Spoerri's whole career appears an effort toward what he has termed 'Détrompe l'oeil'; to 'un-trick' the eye, to see this importance of the 'practical' in our surroundings.¹¹¹ His manner of reversal of pictorial perspective, for instance, is through '...trompe-l'oeil that has managed to go beyond itself and flip-flopped into reality',¹¹² a state which immediately implicates everything surrounding an artwork, its 'phenotype', in the above discussion. And Spoerri's exhibition at HICA became a further specific exploration of the extension of this, as, as I termed it

109 Spatial character '...is always necessarily significant because we are always in real relations to real things and people all of our lives', for instance. N. Bryson, M. A. Holly & K. Moxey (Eds.) *Visual Theory*, p.250

110 S. P. Kashap (Ed), *Studies in Spinoza*, p.48

111 D. Spoerri, *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, p.68

112 Ibid.

in my exhibition essay, a conceptual ‘entanglement’,¹¹³ with the phenomenon of quantum entanglement in mind: ‘Through highlighting the Giardino’s, and HICA’s, rural and remote locations, the exhibition further prompts reflection on the random-seeming, but highly-specific nature of exact results and location, mirroring and expanding on the concerns of the works themselves.’¹¹⁴

Anything in the context of the work may thus become a part of the work, a state which develops a questioning of intentional inclusion. Boyle Family’s *Exit Music* performance, of 1964, comes to mind as an excellent example of this. In this performance an audience were,

...driven around London in a bus from which events could be observed – some were scripted and acted out... while other events were just daily life. As one critic observed, as the audience “continued their journeys, they discovered more and more ‘happenings’ in the street; all of these were, in fact, fortuitous. A fascinating kind of confusion ensues.”¹¹⁵

The extension of this ‘fascinating confusion’ may further bring aspects of the more dispersed context into consideration. Boyle and Hill’s own daily lives, for example, ‘as part of “everything”’, are also considered an inseparable part of the work,¹¹⁶ and for HICA, the particular blurring of art and life here promoted through connection to Spoerri’s Giardino similarly presented an extension of interest, equally reflecting on our own wider context and intentions. Though feeling this is generally best left unstated, the consideration of our own existence within our surroundings, of our own daily lives, and of all the details of how we have pursued the development of HICA, have always been judged as fundamentally significant to the project. In this way, this exhibition particularly brought together several important strands of interest for ourselves: especially apparent in this; the relation to the rural, our own considerations around our garden and veg patch, and the accommodating of guests and nature of our hospitality.

113 HICA, *Exhibitions 2012*, p.26

114 Quoted in my essay from the exhibition’s press release, Appendix A

115 A. Wilson in National Galleries of Scotland, *Boyle Family*, p.47

116 Ibid.

4.42 Concurrency indicating against individual intentionality: another take on the concrete and conceptual: concepts as ‘real’

A sense of concurrency further reflects on questions of intentionality, of whether these things would have happened anyway, if we had not been there to perceive them. Concurrency indicates that they would, and that things similarly occur constantly around us, beyond our awareness. This further reflects on the extent of consciousness, suggesting the limitations to our own consciousness while implying consciousness as more generally pervasive than we, individually, can comprehend. It thus again presents the problem of our physical limitations, a further instance of what I have presented previously as a dilemma between our individual, or general human and ‘spiritual’ relation to wider Nature.

(above) Spoerri at work in his hotel room in Paris. Film still.

(below) **Daniel Spoerri, *Chambre No.13***, 1998

Spoerri’s recreation in bronze at the Giardino, of his hotel room, as it was in 1961

Spoerri's snare-pictures, as snapshots out of permanent, concurrent, process contrarily point-up their individual limitations:

...focusing attention on situations and areas of daily life that are little noticed, if at all. unconscious points of intersection, so to speak, of human activity, or, in other words, the formal and expressive precision of chance at any given moment... i hate stagnations. i hate fixations. i like the contrast provoked by fixating objects, to extract objects from the flow of constant changes and from their perennial possibilities of movement; and this despite my love for change and movement. movement will lead to stagnation. stagnation, fixation, death should provoke change and life, or so i like to believe... and art, what is that? is it perhaps a form of life?¹¹⁷

These 'unconscious points of intersection' seem a variety of Bourriaud's points of 'social infra-thinness'. Indeed, Bourriaud notes Spoerri's *Restaurant Spoerri* as one important precursor to Relational works: 'The constitution of convivial relations has been an historical constant since the 1960's'¹¹⁸ highlighting a further significant instance of continuity in the development of modern artworks within a 'concrete' dialogue, from its origins to the present day.

Reflecting again here on the relation between the concrete and the conceptual; though the American Conceptual artists, as Lippard suggests, may not have been looking specifically back to Duchamp, Spoerri certainly was,¹¹⁹ and Spoerri certainly also identifies his works with a conceptual art:

We, Nouveau Réalisme, Fluxus, Lettrisme, all that overthrew Tachism... We came after and wiped the slate blank... We arrived, that's to say Pop, Nouveau Réalisme, with our logic, which, at heart corresponded above all to concepts... All that was concepts, but still weighted by objects.¹²⁰

117 K. Stiles, & P. Selz (Eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, p.310

118 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.30

119 See for instance D. Spoerri, *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, pp.69-71 on his varied contact and dialogue with Duchamp, and notes on *Edition MAT*, pp.109-111, in which Duchamp's works were included.

120 D. Spoerri, *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, p.10

Ken Friedman's *Notes on Concept Art*, states Fluxus as the first major group of concept artists, and records that 'Henry Flynt, the man who named concept art, defined it as "first of all an art of which the material is 'concepts', as for example the material of music is sound."¹²¹ Here then, again in opposition to Lippard's identification, there is a statement of the material of concepts. Spoerri's works' focus on the material, on concepts, and his involvements with Fluxus present a clear instance of compatibility between the conceptual and concrete, in dialogue with someone like Gerstner, but, in-itself, also outside of questions of the mathematical and 'rational'.

Bourriaud has noted Deleuze and Guattari's definition of philosophy as, "the art of forming, inventing, and manufacturing concepts".¹²² If art may similarly be seen to have always been about the production of concepts, in some form, the question here may then be, in the light of this sense of the materiality of concepts, whether this 'forming, inventing and manufacturing' is of aspects of the 'real'?

Here I return to the question of consciousness in our encountering of forms, as earlier discussed in relation to Eloi Puig's works, to consider that, if form may be judged to embody intellect, or information, then perhaps all things are engaged in developing something on the level of what we experience as concepts or thought: that consciousness may be part of materiality, related to, but separate from Spinoza's sense of Thought, and Penrose' view of consciousness.

Again, Morton asks;

What if consciousness were not "higher" but "lower" than we ever supposed? ...Perhaps consciousness is simply a recursive feature of the "on" state – less than self-consciousness, to be sure, yet providing a platform for it. ...Marx wrongly asserts that humans alone create their environment. Everyone is at it. Atta, the leaf-cutting ant, has towns of millions housing domesticated fungi that don't live anywhere else on Earth. Corals live symbiotically with algae. Coral builds its own world, as do trees. Why distinguish between conscious and unconscious

121 From notes by Ken Friedman included in L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.258

122 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.96

behaviour, or, as Marx puts it, between “the worst architect and the best of bees”?¹²³

Murdo Macdonald quotes William James’ ‘blooming, buzzing confusion’ as perhaps a sense of our vague awareness of background mental activity necessary in the forming of more ordered thoughts,¹²⁴ our communion perhaps with what in Pape’s phrase is ‘in the air’,¹²⁵ or as I suggest is in the environment; the white-noise of background interactions and subconscious musings.

Again, as Morton suggests, this may not be anything unique to humankind; perhaps all things are navigating through some level of this activity. He also states that the boundaries of what we might recognize as ‘consciousness’ are impossible to pin down (for instance in his discussion of Artificial Intelligence¹²⁶). Our concurrency in consciousness is then not just with other existing humans, but perhaps with all things.¹²⁷

What seems especially relevant here for Spoerri is the vital importance of the particular formations that this total process generates; ‘chance’ formations presented as direct evidence of a sense of Thought extended to all things perhaps: all forms’ embodiment of thought through being.

First shown at Spoerri’s *L’Epicerie* show in Copenhagen, in 1961, a pair of glasses with needles ‘pointing in from the lenses’ form a highly significant object in this context, for Spoerri.¹²⁸ While Virginia Button and Charles Esche quote the neurobiologist Samir Zeki, stating that ‘we see in order to be able to acquire knowledge about the world ... Vision just happens to be the most efficient mechanism for acquiring knowledge and it extends our capacity to do so almost infinitely...’¹²⁹ Spoerri’s concern seems to stress, through heightening awareness of our total sensory engagement, the need to even greater attune to this significance in form and formations, to overcome our, as Morton says, ‘blindness to the lowly simplicity

123 T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, pp.72-73

124 HICA, *Exhibitions 2010*, p.23

125 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, p.191

126 T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, pp.72-73

127 Ibid.

128 D. Spoerri, *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, p.86

129 Tate, *Intelligence: New British Art 2000*, p.13

of consciousness’.¹³⁰

Daniel Spoerri

Spectacles with needles, 1960-61

4.43 Proposing the ‘instinctive’ over the ‘intuitive’

I have had to work on this text in blocks of time. With each spell of time I have found it has taken a few days to ‘get into it’, to get my bearings again, to link up ideas, and then for ideas to start ‘popping into my head’. Similarly at the end of each period, this has faded out, also over a period of a few days, as I have become involved in other routines. I note this as a recognition of a more substantial engagement than ideas simply coming out of the ether. It seems quite clear that they have developed from my background thinking, from some habit of thought. I have, as a result of this kind of observation, found myself referring to a sense of ‘instinct’ here in instances where ‘intuition’ might be the more usual identification.

The significance I suggest in this I hope becomes clear when considering again my earlier discussion of our general negotiations of the world, flying blind in terms of ‘rational’ calculations, and relying instead on aesthetic judgments. These judgements might then be seen to be reliant on some sort of ‘instinctual’

130 T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p.73

reasoning; our dealing ‘compositionally’ and therefore ‘relationally’ with the world. Where ‘intuition’ proposes a lack of reasoning, ‘instinct’ states some, perhaps pre- or sub-conscious, engagement.

A sense of the dialogue at work here might also be evidenced by consideration of what seems ‘intuitive’ in the writing itself. The sense of what to say appears. I might set in place various kinds of structures to order my thoughts, but I can’t ‘rationally’ approach it in the moment of writing. It seems clearly a background operation, moving between some other awareness and thought, to consciousness; thought may be made in the mouth¹³¹ as well as through the pen or keyboard, but it sprouts out of this buzzing confusion and basic orientation, at various scales.

Here it is interesting to note Spinoza’s sense of an ‘intuitive knowledge’, additional to what might otherwise appear his similar theory of knowledge to that which I proposed in the chapter *The Nature of Process*,¹³² progressing through degrees of reasoning from ‘knowledge from random experience’ to knowledge from ‘opinion or imagination’, to knowledge that is ‘reason’.¹³³

He describes this intuitive knowledge as proceeding ‘...from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the... essence of things.’¹³⁴

(Bohm’s differentiating between ‘thought’ and ‘intelligent perception’ appears a parallel division to this of Spinoza’s, between orders of reasoned and intuitive knowledge. Bohm proposes this as the difference between what are essentially mechanical processes of thought, and acts of perception.¹³⁵

For example, one may be working on a puzzling problem for a long time. Suddenly, in a flash of understanding, one may see the irrelevance of one’s whole way of thinking about the problem, along with a different approach in which all the elements fit in a new order and in a new

131 Tzara’s consideration, noted by Bourriaud: N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.40

132 See section 2.34

133 B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.57

134 Ibid.

135 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, pp.64-65

structure.¹³⁶

Here, considering this distinction, I suggest a criticism of Bohm’s sense of ‘knowledge as process’: his sense of thought suggests a purely mechanical process that then requires intuitive perception in order to account for thought’s freedom from being entirely deterministic.¹³⁷ In suggesting instead a sense of ‘instinct’ I would intend to propose our permanent engagement through perceptions on differing levels, conscious and subconscious, negating any need for this kind of division, suggesting instead that acts of ‘intelligent perception’ are simply the conscious results of background processes of reasoning.)

My proposal instead of ‘instinct’ here suggests that an ‘adequate idea’ would necessarily be developed through experience, our habitual attuning to our surroundings. In this way artworks also are not mere intuition, but are equally reasoned through experience. They are grounded through instinct in a direct engagement with material reality, equivalent to Renfrew’s noting of this engagement as the basis of symbolic meanings.¹³⁸

(Here it is notable that the basis of Sheldrake’s *A New Science of Life* is ‘... the hypothesis of formative causation, which proposes that nature is habitual... Crystals and molecules also follow the habits of their kind. Cosmic evolution involves an interplay of habit and creativity.’¹³⁹)

This suggestion of instinct as a basis to such things as art-making, reflects on aims of ‘rationality’ in art, as perhaps never possible, desirable or appropriate. That is, ‘intuition’ may never have been the ‘dream’, that van Doesburg supposed,¹⁴⁰ but, more in-line with his equal statement that ‘De Stijl always has striven for a harmony between the realms of intuition and scientific determination’,¹⁴¹ the instinctive and the reasoned perhaps lie very much closer together.

136 Ibid., p.65

137 ‘We have thus put together all the basically mechanical and conditioned responses of memory under one word or symbol, i.e. thought, and we have distinguished this from the fresh, original and unconditioned response of intelligence (or intelligent perception)...’ Ibid.

138 See *The Materiality of Symbols: Redefining Mind* in C. Renfrew, *Prehistory: Making of the Human Mind*, pp.115-119

139 R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, p.1

140 J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.183

141 Ibid., p.189

4.44 The actualising of concrete content: the problem of differentiation

To the extent that ‘thought is made in the mouth’, the particular shape of the mouth influences the shape of the thought, and our adopting a particular shape to influence a meaning (to put on an accent, to adopt some mannerism, posture or approach) reflects a knowledge aware of, and grounded in, particular habits of thinking. Here the possible immediacy of the effects of this ‘instinct’ may then further reflect on a sense of ‘concrete content’ as discussed by Hegel;¹⁴² content as part of the process of becoming actual, where concrete content and concrete form are unified and actualised as the ‘Idea’.

Though our individual and individualising sense may understand these as the actualising of entirely separate acts, can these instead be seen as related parts within a whole – the relation that seems the basic implication of Spoerri’s works?

Bourriaud has stated:

There are no forms in nature, in the wild state, as it is our gaze that creates these, by cutting them out in the depth of the visible. Forms are developed, one from another. When the aesthetic discussion evolves, the status of form evolves along with it, and through it.¹⁴³

While this gives a picture of wholeness, a basic differentiation exists between this ‘wild state’ and our gaze. Where and how might our gaze reside as equally part of the whole?¹⁴⁴

Bohm suggests his central concern as the understanding of ‘the nature of reality in general and of consciousness in particular as a coherent whole, which is never static or complete, but which is in an unending process of movement

¹⁴² G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, pp.76-77

¹⁴³ N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.21

¹⁴⁴ As will later be noted, Bourriaud discusses common misinterpretations of his *Relational Aesthetics* as being focussed on the ethical, clearly stating its primary concern, instead, with new understandings of form: ‘... the book’s thematic focus is the new status of form (new ‘formations’, in order to emphasise the dynamic character of the elements in question, whose area of definition embraces both bodily dispositions and temporality, to which the forms must cohere).’ See *Liam Gillick: One Long Walk... Two Short Piers...*, p.18

and unfoldment’¹⁴⁵ But, he continues ‘... this confronts us with a very difficult challenge: How are we to think coherently of a single, unbroken, flowing actuality of existence as a whole, containing both thought (consciousness) and external reality as we experience it?’¹⁴⁶ Reflecting again that a thing is “what is thought about”, and that it is thus ‘implicit that what is thought about has an existence that is independent of the process of thought’,¹⁴⁷ Bohm considers the sense of agreement between thought and things. Here he comments that our incorrect thoughts about things demonstrate things’ independence from thought,¹⁴⁸ but, he notes, the main indication of the kind of relationship he seeks to suggest between thought and things is that, ‘...when one thinks correctly about a certain thing, this thought can, at least up to a point, guide one’s actions in relationship to that thing to produce an overall situation that is harmonious and free of contradiction and confusion.’¹⁴⁹

4.45 Of form, and between forms and thought: the ‘dance of the mind’

Both thought and things are, for Bohm, abstracted from ‘one undefinable and unknown totality of flux’.¹⁵⁰ In this, they are equal productions of this flux, and attempts ‘...to explain their relationship by supposing that the thought is in reflective correspondence with the thing has no meaning...’.¹⁵¹ He suggests instead that the question of their relation needs considering in a different way, to illustrate he uses the analogy of the dance of the bees ‘...in which one bee is able to indicate the location of honey-bearing flowers to other bees.’¹⁵²

This dance is probably not to be understood as producing in the ‘minds’ of the bees a form of knowledge in reflective correspondence with the flowers. Rather, it is an activity which... acts as a pointer or indicator, disposing the bees to an order of action that will generally lead them to honey... So one may propose for consideration the notion that thought

¹⁴⁵ D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.x

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.xi

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.69

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.70

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

is a sort of 'dance of the mind' which functions indicatively, and which, when properly carried out, flows and merges into an harmonious and orderly sort of overall process in life as a whole.¹⁵³

What is required here, then, is not an explanation that would give us some knowledge of the relationship of thought and thing, or of thought and 'reality as a whole'. Rather, what is needed is an act of understanding; in which we see the totality as an actual process that, when carried out properly, tends to bring about an harmonious and orderly overall action, incorporating both thought and what is thought about in a single movement, in which analysis into separate parts (e.g. thought and thing) has no meaning.¹⁵⁴

Bohm thus further presents the compatibility of the conceptual and the concrete, by proposing them as equal parts of the functioning of the 'totality of flux'.

(In including such views from Bohm's work, it seems a notable point of interest and connection that he maintained dialogues both with Rupert Sheldrake¹⁵⁵ and with the American constructivist artist (or in his terms, 'constructionist') Charles Biederman.¹⁵⁶ Sheldrake has noted the compatibility of his views with Bohm's *Implicate Order*,¹⁵⁷ and judges their sympathy with conclusions from quantum physics in general.¹⁵⁸)

And perhaps equally the forming of differentiation is a necessary part of a pervasive process of development within the whole? This question seems to propose again that, if it is not just our isolated consciousness observing otherwise inert substance, there is a consciousness in the process itself; 'thought' is part of the development of actuality. A suggestion here from this study is of the multiplicity of views (not just human, not just 'conscious') that may then constitute reality, a

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid., p.71

155 An extract from which is included in an appendix to Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life*, pp.299-316

156 This was a 'prolific nine-year correspondence', simultaneous with Bohm's development of *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. See N. Larsen, [2000] *Charles Biederman: A Brief History* [Online], p.12

157 R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, p.14

158 Ibid., pp.14-15

much more amalgamated state than the sole subjective separation of our human consciousness from an otherwise objective world.

Daniel Spoerri

The Topographical Map of Chance, 1961

Excerpt from *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, published 1966

These questions and the sense of process that they develop reflect on Spoerri's works, which also seem to suggest that analysis into separate parts has no meaning, a sense which may be particularly related through what he has termed Eat Art:¹⁵⁹

...his preoccupation that extends from forms resulting from his

159 D. Spoerri, *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, p.75

concentration on one of the two ‘fundamental drives’ (as he states, colloquially put as ‘feeding’ rather than ‘fucking’ – areas of life that exist within an area of clear overlap between our human, and the Natural world) such as *Restaurant Spoerri* and the *Eat Art Gallery*, through his works including meals and their remnants; the works on tables, in kitchens, the cooking and consuming, and to all his works which explore this direct thread of interconnectedness and transformation, this particular gastronomically inclined blurring of art and life: “...I noticed that the moment glued down was only the flash of a second in the course of a whole cycle of life and death, dissolution and rebirth.”¹⁶⁰

Eat Art is the overall process; the consumer and the consumed.¹⁶¹

Thus it is the continual transformation, contrarily highlighted by his ‘permanent fixing’, that sees the significance in the placing of a teaspoon¹⁶² (as one of 80 items, explored in his *Anecdoted Topography of Chance*) on a small table in a fifth floor hotel room at 24 Rue Mouffetard in Paris, on the 17th of October 1961 at precisely 3.47pm.¹⁶³ It is Spoerri’s instinctive awareness of this process, and the significance of our actions within it that anticipates such notions as the ‘Butterfly Effect.’

This stressing of the uncertain, chaotic and infinitesimal, includes the conceptual as part of the concrete, in works which, as Deleuze comments on Spinoza, move beyond ‘the infinitely perfect as a property, towards the absolutely infinite as Nature’.¹⁶⁴

160 HICA, *Exhibitions 2012*, pp.29-30, including a quote from Spoerri

161 Ibid., p.30

162 D. Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, p.55

163 Ibid., pp.xv-xvi

164 G. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, p.44

4.5 HICA exhibition: Camila Sposati: *Green-Dyed Vulture* 14 October – 18 November 2012

4.51 The static and dynamic; a reflection on Hegel: a development indicated by Sposati

Daniel Spoerri’s works, notably, still appear ‘fixed’ in time. We see the results as temporally squashed, where in actuality one piece was glued down after another. His ‘permanent fixing’ perhaps contains as part of its contradictoriness a sense of instantaneous creation, but we can also imagine the temporal development of other similarly ‘fixed’ artworks; as with Spoerri, so with Mondrian, for instance. We can still reflect on their relational development as it actually was, in time.

This development suggests their ‘working out’, their development as ‘knowledge’ – even for Spoerri; his thinking about the process of the world, in some way, through observation of each object fixed; his attuning of his ‘dance of the mind’. As with one of the basic conclusions of Krauss’ discussion in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, this ‘dance’ and its objects and results thus suggest their meaning as ‘a function of lived time.’¹⁶⁵

But, despite this, we are still accustomed to viewing them as separated from the overall process, escaping the temporal and experiential, in the manner of Fried’s static viewpoint. Bohm again notes the contrariness of thought, in that ‘whenever one thinks of anything, it seems to be apprehended either as static, or as a series of static images’;¹⁶⁶ this ‘virtual’ nature appears part of our thought processes, a feature of our experiencing thought as separate from external reality. And this difficulty seems present also within our general encountering of things as ‘totalities’, which disregards things’ dynamic natures as well as their wider ‘phenotypical’ involvements. Their morphology is considered in static isolation even as it shifts and transforms.¹⁶⁷

Bohm’s suggestion of a ‘dance of the mind’ may usefully be compared to Hegel’s

165 R. E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, p.240

166 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.x

167 Ibid., pp.x-xi, or see for instance R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, pp.73-74

sense of 'concrete content' at this point; perhaps its equivalent, updated by understandings of modern physics to imply something more physicalist than spiritual (and which may still indicate a sympathetic conclusion in the nature of the fundamental, relating to energy, as will be discussed).

Hegel's¹⁶⁸ sense of reciprocity between the form of the material world and the development of its 'concept', a joint evolution which contemporaneously forms both objective and absolute spirit¹⁶⁹ suggests a way that the particular and concrete may be part of a unified, universal, whole:¹⁷⁰ '... the essence or nature of anything essentially manifests itself. It is only an essence in virtue of its manifestation, and the manifestation is as essential as the essence.'¹⁷¹ Hegel stipulates that the content in this relation 'should not be anything abstract in itself'¹⁷² nor should it be concrete, in the way that a physical form is, but rather it should be concrete in itself through a congruence of 'genuine truth in the mind as well as in nature'.¹⁷³ This is then the particular sense I suggest may be compared to Bohm's 'dance of the mind', '...which, when properly carried out, flows and merges into an harmonious and orderly sort of overall process in life as a whole.'¹⁷⁴

By determining a sense here of the conceptually concrete, Hegel finds a way for content 'in spite of its universality' to also have 'both subjectivity and particularity within it.'¹⁷⁵ Indeed, he sees the universal and particular as required and necessary aspects of the truly concrete.¹⁷⁶ '...a mere abstract universal has not in itself the vocation to advance to particularity and phenomenal manifestation and to unity with itself therein.'¹⁷⁷ Concreteness therefore belongs to both form and to content, and concrete content necessitates a corresponding concrete form: the form must be 'no less emphatically something individual, wholly concrete in itself,

168 This section reworks part of the conclusions from my MFA thesis: G. Lucas, MFA thesis: *A Consideration of Theo van Doesburg's Manifesto for Concrete Art*, pp.15-16

169 Michael Inwood, in his Introduction to G.W.F., Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, p.xx

170 Ibid., p.77

171 Ibid., p.xxi

172 Ibid., p.76

173 Ibid., p.77

174 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.x

175 G.W.F., Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, p.77

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid.

and one.'¹⁷⁸ Žižek notes how Hegel's 'concrete universality' in this way closes the gap that would otherwise exist between a general abstract universality and its concrete particular manifestation: there is not an otherwise-existent 'abstract' that is 'applied', but the universal and particular are part of immediate actualisation, in an immanent tension; 'inherent to universality itself'.¹⁷⁹ This then is the constantly developing process, where 'the concrete content itself involves the element of external and actual',¹⁸⁰ forming what is actualised, in its constant transformation. Or, as Michael Inwood explains, 'the absolute is not a static underlying essence, whose manifestations are inessential to it...'¹⁸¹ The particular manifestations constitute the absolute, by which process, 'man and his cognitive and practical activities are not simply a manifestation of the absolute, but the highest phase of the absolute...'¹⁸² Or perhaps, as I hope to suggest here, 'man' is only one part of the manifested absolute, the manifestation of the 'concrete content' of Nature, in general.

This reciprocity thus provides means to consider the contrary nature of the static and dynamic: the Absolute is not a static underlying essence, nor are its manifestations at any point truly static, even if they are part of totality. The realization and development of the process, and the growth of the Absolute as concrete unity, sees an 'expansion and reconciliation' of particularities, which at each point in the process exist as the totality of the Idea.¹⁸³

Following Hegel then, the essentially monist focus of De Stijl may be included here as example: they, for instance, '[reconcile] in Neo-Plasticism' the 'dualism of mind and matter',¹⁸⁴ as Mondrian clearly states, or judge, as Schoenmaekers further clarifies, the particular to be '...beside the absolute', 'as being one with the absolute, as its proper infelt opposite'.¹⁸⁵

De Stijl's observation of a structure of oppositions, in accord with such understandings from Hegel, is again part of what may be suggested as updated

178 Ibid.

179 S. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, pp.19-20

180 G.W.F., Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, p.77

181 Ibid., p.xviii

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid., p.82

184 H.L.C. Jaffé, *De Stijl 1917-1931*, p.60

185 Ibid., p.115

by Bohm, and which begins more particular discussion of a development that has provided part of the background to this text and study, that perhaps suggests reasons and cause of the underlying malaise the study has sought to consider, and which forms a necessary shift in understanding, in forming my conclusions: this sense from De Stijl/Hegel appears to us through our human, subjective, understanding of the processes of objective reality. There seem necessary contradictions within it, when it is translated to our understandings and language: a state which may be informed, and thus developed within this consideration by insights from modern physics, as I will move on to discuss.

These tensions, between static and dynamic, general and particular, through processes of transformation, and a more particular focus on a shift to understandings from the ‘new’ physics, may be reflected on in the work of Camila Sposati. Specifically contemplating a sense of temporal process she focuses ‘...on revealing relations between colour and shape in dynamic systems and investigating our experiential responses: the works’ multi-sensory aspects and our conceptual understandings’.¹⁸⁶ These works employ, for example, dispersing smoke, or are the result of research into ‘...transformative processes on microscopic and global scales, growing crystals in laboratories or studying geological effects in the Earth’s crust...’¹⁸⁷

Camila Sposati, *Layer in Earth and Crystal*, 2012
Digital print

¹⁸⁶ See the exhibition’s press release, Appendix A

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. It is notable in this discussion that the forms of her smoke-works naturally echo Haroldo de Campos’ poem *Cristal Forma*, earlier discussed in section 3.37, while her creation of crystals may be seen to reflect on his theme. Thus the conversation here may be judged in close connection to all said earlier regarding his poem and the ‘hunger of form’ as part of this process.

Camila Sposati, *Highlands (Rainbow)*, 2012
Smoke sculpture (digital print)

4.52 Manifesting environmental concrete content?

Of particular interest here is Sposati’s further linking these organic processes to the ‘...cultural and anthropological understandings of the forms she explores. Visits to sites of man-made sinkholes such as Darvaza, in Turkmenistan, or in Guatemala City have led her to consider the essential discourse she observes between geological processes, the civilizations that inhabit these regions and the artefacts they produce’¹⁸⁸ suggesting causal connections, as with Bohm’s sense of interactions between thought and environment, between the ‘thought’ of those cultures existing as part of the ecosystem and the shape of that system, even to the extent of microscopic or global effects. In this regard Sposati has discussed the Anthropocene,¹⁸⁹ the sense maintained by some scientists of a new period that we now live in, in which humanity acts as an equivalent to a geological force, and which is thus characterised by the influence of human actions on the environment.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ See the exhibition’s press release, Appendix A

¹⁸⁹ C. Sposati, (2012), E-mail: *Re: excerpt*, Personal e-mail to the author.

¹⁹⁰ Žižek comments on this, in S. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p.330-331

Camila Sposati, still from *Darvaza*, 2012
Film, 8 mins (looped)

A new work, shown at HICA, *Unlock*, seems particularly significant for Sposati in this relation, a response to her work in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and travelling along the ancient Silk Road:

The piece, a [silk] print, hung on a wall and tied to the ground by two stones, shows a cartographic image of the earth. Reflecting the fabrics and tapestries of the nomadic cultures she encountered, it describes the fragility of a body in constant movement and in unpredictable patterns; our experience of gravity and magnetism.¹⁹¹

What seems surprising here is the piece's in many ways illustrative approach to its subject: it seems closest to what might be actual artefacts from these cultures in this way, which prompts thoughts that, despite her intended 'conscious' engagement, this work results more from some less-intentional and 'intuitive' process; as some manifestation of these wider influences, in some relation to what I have discussed as possibly the ultimate focus of Doug Fishbone's works, equally under possession by forces on some global, Gaian, scale. Are we then simply channelling vast environmental meanings, manifesting some environmental

191 See the exhibition's press release, Appendix A

concrete content?

Camila Sposati, *Unlock*, 2012
Silk print, stone, rope

Fishbone's asking, 'maybe its impossible to know anything with any certainty at all?' points up our lack of conscious knowledge, but presents the possibility that our knowledge may be the process we find ourselves within, in some way, and in the same way that we perhaps generally discount our overfamiliar 'understandings' of our qualified surroundings: we 'know' absolutely how to operate in this process, to the extent that we are part of the process. Deleuze discusses Spinoza and Nietzsche's conceptions of consciousness:

Consciousness... is purely transitive. But it is not a property of the Whole or of any specific whole; it has only an informational value, and what is more, the information is necessarily confused and distorted. Here again, Nietzsche is strictly Spinozan when he writes: "The greater activity is unconscious; consciousness usually only appears when a whole wants to subordinate itself to a superior whole. It is primarily the consciousness of this superior whole, of reality external to the ego. Consciousness is born in relation to a being of which we could be a function; it is the means by which we incorporate into that being."¹⁹²

How might Sposati's other works relate to this sense? Her smoke-works suggest an equivalent indefinite expansion to Barry's inert gas series, but seem to have more in common with Sol Lewitt's definition of a (small 'c') conceptual art, where the idea may be paramount but the material form remains significant;¹⁹³ while her use of smoke develops her interest in the processes of entropy, of order and disorder, and the tendency of matter to shift towards equilibrium,¹⁹⁴ the bright colours of her smokes are aesthetic choices, judged in relation to the works' contexts.

Camila Sposati, *Yellow Vanishing Points*, 2010. Smoke sculpture

¹⁹² G. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, pp.21-22

¹⁹³ L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.vii

¹⁹⁴ The Arts Catalyst, *Camila Sposati residency at University College London, July – October 2007*, [Online]

For Sposati's piece for the Artists' Airshow at HICA, in 2010,¹⁹⁵ for example, she responded to the often misty conditions locally, finding a colour of smoke that might be sympathetic to the surroundings. After several experiments, a deep yellow smoke was chosen. Her work, *Yellow Vanishing Points* did indeed, on the day, combine with very misty conditions; several plumes forming an extended veil of smoke, blending with the slow air-currents and contours of the hill, as an organic, seeping, growing, then slowly dissipating, mass.

4.53 A critical reflection on Neo-Concretism

In this discussion, my questioning of the 'intuitive' nature of these aesthetic choices prompts a consideration here of Neo-Concretism; the especially Brazilian identification which Sposati (also Brazilian) sees her works as related to.¹⁹⁶

The *Neo-Concrete Manifesto* argues between rational and intuitive positions,¹⁹⁷ both of which I suggest here as problematic. In this it is against an 'extreme' rationalism,¹⁹⁸ and in favour of a more intuitive approach that may ultimately enable a 'primordial and thorough experience of the real'.¹⁹⁹

Rational tendencies, it suggests, pursue the purely mechanistic.²⁰⁰ Countering these it seeks to re-establish more expressive possibilities,²⁰¹ more in-keeping with the originators of Concretism and Constructivism; discussing such artists as Mondrian and Malevich, Pevsner and Vantongerloo.²⁰² The Neo-Concretes wish to assert works then as more than just machines or objects and in this respect discuss artworks as 'organisms',²⁰³ a sense which develops their

¹⁹⁵ earlier discussed in section 2.33

¹⁹⁶ See the exhibition's press release, Appendix A

¹⁹⁷ See Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, pp.80-83

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.80

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.83

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.80

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Here I would refer the reader back to my note of Karl Gerstner's comment on Vantongerloo and Mondrian in section 4.41; their actually being 'diametrically opposed' in their concerns.

²⁰³ Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, pp.82

‘spatialization’;²⁰⁴ artworks are essentially more than the sum of their parts and this is literally so through their integration into the space of their phenomenological experiencing (something which also especially develops a sense of their temporal transformations).²⁰⁵ It is this ‘more than’ which is their ‘transcendence’ and their significance.²⁰⁶ Paulo Herkenhoff’s observation that ‘Albers’ optical-effect regime, rather than Max Bill’s space with its predictable mathematical form, was to be the crucial reference for Neo-Concrete artists’ neatly summarises this distinction.²⁰⁷

There is something in the general spirit of the Manifesto that this study is in sympathy with, and which I will return to. But in other respects there seem very basic problems with the position of the Manifesto regarding the procedures of a Concrete Art. Given instances such as Herkenhoff’s discussion of Waldemar Cordeiro, as somewhat dictatorial in his ‘rational’ pursuit²⁰⁸ Neo-Concretism seems a particular response to a Brazilian situation seeking to develop an expressly rational art. Though Cordeiro’s statement that ‘Concrete painting should dilute all indices of the presence of the artist’,²⁰⁹ argued against by the Neo-Concretes, would, by this study, remain a necessary consideration in a conception of a Concrete Art: to take the work out of the hands of its maker, or at least to throw this relation into question, to highlight the workings of a ‘structure of oppositions’ in the work and in its relation to its author. Into this delicate balance the Manifesto appears to introduce an unhelpful stress on the artist’s subjectivity.²¹⁰

The Manifesto gives the example of the verticals and horizontals of Mondrian’s paintings, as forms which exist, in their experiencing, independent of his theories, to promote the ‘prevalence of production over theory’.²¹¹ And this seems the clearest point at which the difficulties of Neo-Concretism open up. In promoting this perception Neo-Concretism appears to discount the peculiar congruence between form and content that means a form may in some way embody its ‘theory’. While the manifesto’s stating of the difficulties in simply illustrating theory, especially if the theory may then be shown to be false,²¹² seems a fair point,

204 Ibid., p.83

205 Ibid., pp.81-82

206 Ibid., p.82

207 Ibid., p.30

208 Ibid., p.27

209 Ibid.

210 It ‘reintroduces the problem of expression’, Ibid., p.81

211 Ibid., p.80

212 Ibid.

the important problem here for the Neo-Concretes’ seeking of a nominalistic and expressive particular, in ‘intuition’, is that it throws out a sense of the general, which then negates the potential for that tension of the universal and particular in immediate actualisation (vital, for instance, to Hegel). Without this, these forms are no ‘more than’ Mondrian’s expression. But their point, in manifesting this tension, is their rationale: again, as Krauss notes, Mondrian’s aim is to paint the operations of Hegel’s dialectic:²¹³ his “dynamic equilibrium” is not just a theory around the structure of oppositions, which his paintings illustrate, his horizontals and verticals *are* this. Their form is a manifestation of concrete content and there is something in this, that if and when the artwork ‘works’, rings true.

Further to this, the Neo-concrete promotion of the phenomenological appears to then intend an objective sense from its position, something which sees potential for a ‘primordial experience of the real’.²¹⁴ A more orthodox ‘Concrete’ point, the procedure taken forward by those such as the New Tendencies, for instance, is purposefully to present ‘facts’ which develop our interpretations and subjective responses, and which may then become objects of consideration and reflection in themselves.²¹⁵

There are then, here, important differences suggested within similar seeming senses of works within transformative processes; differences significant in the handling of each detail of a work.

Here, I propose again as more useful the consideration of the ‘instinctive’, over the ‘intuitive’: The Neo-Concretes equally discount the ‘simple’ and ‘reflexive’ responses engendered by rational artworks.²¹⁶ Ferreira Gullar states for instance, ‘The fight against the object continues’,²¹⁷ echoing Fried, even in his temporal and phenomenological concerns. Here, the instinctive, grounded in our habitual immersion in the ‘practical’, our necessary involvements with spatial character, enables a non-rational, non-theoretical basis for the development of

213 R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, pp.237-238

214 Ibid., p.83

215 See, for instance, Karl Gerstner’s comments again, in M. Rosen (Ed.) *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, A Magazine, and the Computer’s Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973*, p.163

216 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space*, pp.82

217 Ibid., p.22

Mondrian's vertical and horizontal; a basis that connects our conceptual selves with the 'universal'. To reflect on Nietzsche's comment again; 'the greater activity is unconscious'. Our constant dialogue is with things of the order of gravity; inseparable from stuff, but to call our understandings from this dialogue 'intuition' denies them their (experiential) reasoning. This is where metacommunication occurs, through 'the same factors as ultimately determine the degree of grace of elk or gazelle',²¹⁸ where the effort is to explore the 'reason' in the 'simple' and 'reflexive' dialogue between a form and its environment.

The instinctive then provides our most basic coordinates in developing our 'maps', which may then prove inaccurate, or, in our ever-increasing awareness of 'reality', prove profoundly inadequate, but that seems as it should be, our maps having a function within the wider process, not ends in-themselves. Here then instead the need to explore our simple and reflexive responses, the 'practical' and its connection to the universal; a separation, but one which implies a unity as its basis, and wonders at the necessary manifestation of this unity through its productions; their 'shape conformable with truth'.

Art, by this, would, again following Bohm, not be 'explanation' but an involved 'act of understanding'; something that in our encounterings and explorations of our surroundings, does 'ring true', that indicates a communication, some presence of a shared 'concrete content' perhaps. The real possibility then presented here, and suggested variously through this study is that of individual agency, the 'hunger of form', our part in the 'activity' of forming, in Hegel's terms, the Absolute.

4.54 Intending beyond 'classical' understandings

To return though to my noting some sympathy with the spirit of the *Neo-Concrete Manifesto*, to develop the last point in this chapter, a point which, in forming my wider conclusions, will be considered more fully in the next section.

From outside the particular focus of this discussion of the 'concrete', the Manifesto appears in-tune with, or one manifestation of, a sense of broad cultural

²¹⁸ HICA, *Exhibitions 2011*, p.20: my comment expanding on the statement by D'Arcy Thomson, 'the elk is of necessity less graceful than the gazelle'. See W. D'Arcy Thomson, *On Growth and Form*, p.20

shift from the High Modern to the Postmodern,²¹⁹ a continuation of this particular development.

While any such shifts are reliant on innumerable factors, van Doesburg's writings clearly suggest an overview of this trajectory, from the very start of modernism, indicating at heart a re-alignment from understandings consistent with a Classical physics, to understandings of a new physics: 'In order to achieve a new orientation in art, it is absolutely necessary to acknowledge this increasing need for reality. It has developed from our having an isolated abstract religious culture no longer suited to our emotional life.'²²⁰ He variously considers in this our '...new orientation in the fields of modern science and technology.'²²¹ where especially 'these elementary renovations find their equivalent in the theory of relativity, in the new research on the nature of matter...'²²²

Bohm, and also Heisenberg, variously describe the development of modern physics from classical physics. Classical physics conceives 'of the universe as a machine'.²²³ In this,

The laws of physics... express the reason or ratio in the movement of all the parts, in the sense that the law relates the movement of each part to the configuration of all the other parts. This law is deterministic in form, in that the only contingent features of a system are the initial positions and velocities of all its parts.²²⁴

Heisenberg elaborates;

The mechanics of Newton and all the other parts of classical physics constructed after its model started from the assumption that one can describe the world without speaking about God or ourselves. This possibility soon seemed almost a necessary condition for natural science

²¹⁹ In the works' it supports, such as Pape's *Opera Concreta*, Oiticica's *Parangoles*, and so on.

²²⁰ J. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, p.158

²²¹ Ibid., p.159

²²² Ibid., p.167. Again note might also be made of the many scientific publications in van Doesburg's library. Ibid., p.28

²²³ D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.145

²²⁴ Ibid., p.153

in general.²²⁵

As part of a development of this classical thinking, that Heisenberg suggests begins with Descartes,²²⁶ he identifies several differing takes on 'realism'.²²⁷ One of these, 'Dogmatic realism', he suggests,

...claims that there are no statements concerning the material world that can not be objectivated. Practical Realism has always been and will always be an essential part of natural science. Dogmatic realism, however, is, as we see it now, not a necessary condition for natural science. But it has in the past played a very important role in the development of science: actually the position of classical physics is that of dogmatic realism.²²⁸

The New thus departs from this material objectivity, as Heisenberg continues; 'it is only through quantum theory that we have learned that exact science is possible without the basis of dogmatic realism'.²²⁹ Here, he suggests, it has actually become increasingly apparent that 'Natural science... describes nature as exposed to our method of questioning',²³⁰ and thus the 'sharp separation'²³¹ between the world and the I, imposed by Descartes, is impossible. In reflecting on the difficulties in shifting understandings from the classical to the new, Heisenberg reflects on this Cartesian separation and 'partition', which '...has penetrated deeply into the human mind during the three centuries following Descartes and it will take a long time for it to be replaced by a really different attitude toward the problem of reality.'²³² Thus he variously also notes the 'violent' reactions resulting from the sense of the foundations of physics starting to move, from '...a feeling that the ground would be cut from science.'²³³

In this light the *Neo-Concrete Manifesto* implies the overtly rational tendencies of some exponents of a Concrete Art, in their 'mechanistic' approach, as still allied in some way to a Classical physics. The Neo-Concretes' efforts to a more 'expressive'

225 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.42

226 Ibid., p.40

227 Ibid., p.43

228 Ibid.

229 Ibid.

230 Ibid.

231 Ibid.

232 Ibid.

233 Ibid., p.113

sense of artworks equates to this need to fully take on the consequences of this re-orientation, hence the discussion of artworks' 'spatialization'; their form as 'organisms' and their integration into the space of their experiencing. Though here I also add a caveat, relating to the apparent difficulties within the manifesto: while this appears the spirit of the manifesto I suggest its stated intention of a breakthrough to some 'primordial and thorough experience of the real' actually aligns more closely to a belief still in classical notions of an objective real, than does the orthodox Concrete position it argues against. And, as a 'for instance'; Augusto de Campos and the Noigandres poets, clearly state their earlier Concrete works' alignment already to modern physics; the seeing of 'things-words' in space-time essential to their understanding.²³⁴

In relation to this discussion, prompted by the Manifesto, it may be noted that Hal Foster has suggested the formalist and modernist as one thing, and avant-garde and postmodern as another.²³⁵ I would intend that this study, overall, demonstrates these as more complex in their intertwining. Foster quotes Baudelaire, "by 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable"²³⁶ – modernity for Baudelaire, is this 'contingent' half, the half that might be judged to align more with the new physics, where the classical appears still focussed on the 'eternal' and 'immutable'.²³⁷ By this, Foster's identification of 'postmodern' has more claim to being the originating spirit of the 'modern'. (Or, as I will again discuss in my concluding section, these two halves together perhaps further develop the sense of a 'structure of oppositions'.)

234 As stated in their *Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry*, 1958. J. Bandeira, & L. de Barros, *Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, p.90. De Campos also clarifies; "Space-time" ...refers to modern physics and the concept of relativity, in that it stresses the interpenetration of space and time in the text.' A. de Campos, (2011), Personal e-mail to the author

235 H. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.58

236 Ibid., p.88. This quote is from 1863, the year that Bowness notes as a breakthrough year for Manet, with the mounting of the Salon de Refusés, and which he thus takes as the start date for his history of modern painting. A. Bowness, *Modern European Art*, pp.9-11

237 Sheldrake has noted; 'the patriarch of modern science, Sir Francis Bacon, asserted in 1620 that the laws of Nature were 'eternal and immutable', and science's founding fathers, including Kepler, Galileo, Descartes and Newton, saw them as immaterial mathematical ideas in the mind of God. R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, p.1

Again, Barry's *From a Measured Volume to an Indefinite Expansion* is a useful example, that may be understood as equally representative of the 'new' development intended by the Neo-concrete manifesto, and, as suggested at the start of this chapter, may also be consistent with van Doesburg's projections for a Concrete Art. Sposati's works then appear to directly continue this line of thinking and making, expressly exploring the nature of matter and energy, the unity of these indicated by the new physics:

[*Yellow Vanishing Points*]...could be seen to present a dualism of matter and spirit, where air may represent something immaterial, in a schema where through decreasing density, solid breaks down into liquid, liquid into gas, gas into some ethereal plasma, which, at some further point, becomes something actually immaterial. This work, I would suggest, presents the opposite, where by extension even the nothingness of space would still be understood as substantial. As Peter Stevens says "...space has a real material structure...our common-sense idea that space is a big nothing has been replaced with the more sophisticated thought that space is a big everything." Seeing [Sposati's] work in this light, the air is shown as material; the piece demonstrates that ethereality is not exclusive of temporality.²³⁸

Her crystal-works, as 'low entropy' states, and the 'high entropy' in her smoke-works, demonstrate her seeking in both states to reveal a mysterious and invisible animating presence, activating the forms and driving the processes of change.²³⁹ But, made explicit by considering the processes of entropy, the presence is that of energy, understood to be interconvertible with matter.²⁴⁰ Heisenberg states,

All the elementary particles can, at sufficiently high energies, be transmuted into other particles, or they can simply be created from kinetic energy and can be annihilated into energy, for instance into radiation. Therefore, we have here actually the final proof for the unity of matter. All the elementary particles are made of the same substance, which we

238 G. Lucas, *Transfer Document*, p.18

239 The Arts Catalyst, *Camila Sposati residency at University College London, July – October 2007*, [Online]

240 As in its definition in J. Pearsall & B. Trumble (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, p.466

may call energy or universal matter; they are just different forms in which matter can appear.²⁴¹

For someone like van Doesburg, intimately involved in this development of the 'new' in art, and closely following developments also in the new physics, it may well have appeared that Einstein's assertion of this interconvertible nature, as expressed in his iconic formulation, $E=MC^2$,²⁴² was close to some scientific realisation of an equivalent to Hegel's Absolute, especially considering the sense of trajectory pursued through the period van Doesburg reflects on: our 'abstract religious culture' manifested in perspective painting, the forming from this of a point of 'concrete content', as works contemplate the step out from the canvas, to their resulting concrete 'real space' manifestation.

The root-cause of the possible malaise, hanging over from the 'decline' of Cubism, through the 'postmodern' period and to the present, might then be seen as the struggle and doubt still involved in the cultural coming to terms with the implications of this shift from a Classical to a New physics, where, as I have noted, even our language still lags some way behind, perhaps preventing the full significance of this change from being realised.

(Sheldrake variously indicates the difficulties even for science in assimilating concepts from the 'new' physics: 'Until the 1960s, most physicists took it for granted that the universe was eternal, governed by changeless laws and made up of a constant amount of matter and energy';²⁴³ 'In the 1980s, the mechanistic theory of life seemed set for ultimate triumph', and in the 1990s, the 'Decade of the Brain', 'Life and mind would be fully explicable in terms of molecular and neural machinery... All those who thought that minds involved something beyond the reach of mechanistic science would be refuted forever';²⁴⁴ 'Many biologists are still trying to reduce the phenomena of life and mind to the mechanistic physics of the nineteenth century, but physics has moved on'.²⁴⁵)

In his chapter *Language and Reality in Modern Physics*,²⁴⁶ Heisenberg, for

241 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.107

242 See for instance J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.38

243 R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, p.1

244 Ibid., p.5

245 Ibid., pp.13-14

246 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, pp.113-128

instance, variously explores this lagging behind of language, through the various problems of compatibility between its usage and what it seeks to describe: i.e. ‘... we cannot speak about the atoms in ordinary language’.²⁴⁷ He highlights through this a fundamental difficulty, especially significant in what is known as the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum theory;²⁴⁸ stating a necessary and inevitable paradoxical situation with regard to the theory and the language used to describe it, where ‘the use of the classical concepts is finally a consequence of the general human way of thinking’.²⁴⁹ ... ‘The concepts of classical physics are just a refinement of the concepts of daily life and are an essential part of the language which forms the basis of all natural science’.²⁵⁰ He notes some suggestions that these concepts should then be radically changed to present a ‘completely objective description of nature’,²⁵¹ but this he states is a misunderstanding; the ‘necessity of using the classical concepts’ is an inescapable paradox,²⁵² and we are thus just ‘discussing what could be done if we were other beings than we are’.²⁵³

4.55 Questions developed by a state of paradox

And in connection with this particular paradox between a sense of objective reality and our human understanding, I wish to reflect again on what I suggest as a still pressing dilemma around our subject/object relations. Where, for van Doesburg, technological advancement allied to a move from the fictional to the factual may have indicated a clear direction, in our lifetime an awareness of such things as limited resources and global warming give a rather different perspective. It is interesting to note Bourriaud’s comment on his research into the origins of modernism, in the early and mid-Nineteenth Century, suggesting its essential connection to the greater exploitation of oil for energy, and the perceived possibility of unlimited energy supplies.²⁵⁴ Perhaps our new awareness of environmental

247 Ibid., p.122

248 See for instance J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp.121-128: The Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum theory was developed by Niels Bohr and others, including Heisenberg, working in Copenhagen in the mid to late 1920s. It will be further discussed in the next and concluding chapter.

249 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.23

250 Ibid.

251 Ibid.

252 Ibid., p.24

253 Ibid., p.23

254 N. Bourriaud, *On Filliou*, Lecture given at Leeds: Henry Moore Institute

limitations necessitates an equivalent progression into a new era, in which the questions may be posed: does humanity continue along a scientific and technological route of development, or not? Does our advancement in science provide ever greater control over Nature, realising desires, such as those of the original Constructivists, or does the New physics reinforce an insurmountable degree of distance from any real sense of control?

The state of paradox around concepts of classical and modern physics, as Heisenberg discusses, certainly posits our human viewpoint as inescapable, even though we may now have proven to ourselves that it is not essentially correct. In this case we may reflect that, by means of our developed technology, we are creating our own parallel human ‘classical’ world parasitically within the ‘totality of flux’, a world in which we may gain some control, replicating our vision of the objective world, given technology’s ever increasing sophistication, perhaps even on a scale of one-to-one; through nanotechnology, quantum computing and so on.

Perhaps here understandings from the New physics may enable a more enlightened approach, that might see our technology become more ‘immanent’ (in ‘green’ technologies, for instance), and in this way our living become sustainable, realising more fully that we function as part of the wider flux as well as within this human vision. Or perhaps again the point may be to live through this dilemma, as the Marises suggest with their ‘pursuit of fidelity’.²⁵⁵ The conclusions thus far through this study might suggest this less as a direct and necessary ‘pursuit’, even if this may be how we experience it, and more of a sense of ‘pursuit’ as an inevitable part of the wider process: the pursuit is unsatisfactory as our ‘maps’ are necessarily imperfect, reflecting the ‘transitive’ nature of our consciousness,²⁵⁶ our part in the ‘absolutely infinite as Nature’²⁵⁷ (and alongside all other subjectivities within this, also focussed on their own needs and desires). This sense affords a questioning of the ends we feel ourselves to work towards: these may not be as we imagine them to be. We may be fulfilling other functions even as we pursue our individual goals.

The difficulties of fully appreciating the implications of the New physics, the

255 See section 1.53

256 G. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, p.21

257 Ibid., p.44

inability to exploit it in our language and day to day experience, may come from not being able to fully incorporate it into our instinctual knowledge, which would seem to rest on 'classical' foundations, even if these are in turn reliant on and, to a degree, informed by objective reality, providing our basic physical understandings and orientations: we are necessarily separate from its scale of operation, either in the very small (quantum), or very big (relativity). We may be in contact with it through the interface of our experience, but appear to necessarily be denied access to its proper workings, presenting some sort of inverted 'brains in vats' scenario: we are not separate outside of an induced illusion, but work with an illusory understanding as part of wider existence.

In this way though there seems a further possibility; that the scale at which we operate and interact with forms, is as 'real' as anything and everything else. Our knowledge reflects our place in the world, our surroundings. These are anything but meaningless and formless (as perhaps the result of our 'classical' embeddedness). We understand the world at the scale of the forms we perceive, suggesting the possibility here of our negotiating of a world of consciousness as it is presented by form. Our understandings would not seem invalidated by our not understanding everything about these forms, as we, for example, use language without consciously understanding its mechanics. A 'new' sense of concrete involvement might then propose an end to seeking the 'rational' limits of everything as 'explanation', and instead find ways to develop our involved acts of 'understanding', through more 'human-scale' and immanent connections: highlighting the significance of our aesthetic responses to, and interactions with what we perceive as form, and the processes of its constant transformation.

5 Towards a Quancrete Art

5.1 Reviewing HICA's programmes and the discussion in the corresponding chapters of this text

The format of HICA's programmes (four main exhibitions comprising an annual series of shows), came to an end with 2012's exhibitions. The investigations that had formed the basis of our programmes since our opening in 2008, equally began, through 2012, to form their various conclusions, enabling a more reflective and speculative approach, a state that was manifested in our 2013 project as one longer residency and exhibition, very naturally forming the concluding section of this study.

Matching the developing consideration through HICA's overall programme I have, in this written study, presented broad aspects of its focus and concerns as chapters, to reflect the thinking that was the basis of, and the response to, each annual series of shows.

To briefly summarize here, these have been:

An indication of what I suggest are the main relevant points in the history of the discussion, serving to identify 'the problem'; an historical investigation working towards a sense of materiality of meaning and thus of engaging the 'real', while reflecting on the difficulties and complexities then encountered; a brief outlining of what may be taken as orthodox understandings of the dynamic of ideas through this period in art theory, which, in combination, indicate some reasons for a sense of malaise and resulting confusion.

A more particular reflection on the rational and/or irrational workings of artworks; through this a consideration of their procedures in relation to concepts of knowledge, science and process, and a reflection specifically on the work of Theo van Doesburg in relation to these areas; the perceiving of ways to explore engagements of the 'real' in considering the effects of works in the space of viewers'/peoples' lives. Here complexity is suggested, experienced as chance, and through subjective responses within natural processes, enabling the potential

for engagement, consistent with the basic modernist intent toward 'active' interventions within these processes.

A consideration, from this sense of process, of its physical nature, and a basic relation to meaning that may then develop from it; presenting potential for immanent rather than transcendent understandings of what may be universal; the immediate, local, generation of particular forms from 'general' conditions, within a sense of all-pervading process, as expressions of the nature of space; noting the consequent development of order from 'chance' and complexity; our being necessary and equal parts of an immanent process, but experiencing a separation from it, and positions, such as van Doesburg's, stating our human subjectivity as an opposition to nature and materiality, within a contradictory unity, presenting the questions of which of these spheres should form the focus of our concerns, which forms the ground of meaning for artworks?

Developing from this questioning of subjectivity, an exploration of the relation of consciousness to materiality; a re-stating of complexity within this, in, as one of what seem several possibilities, the presenting of consciousness as a feature of the same, essentially physical, pervading process; the stressing of the aesthetic nature of our general experience in negotiating the world, and as response to our immersion in 'formal' meanings; the proposal of the dispersed nature of consciousness from this, its 'phenotypical' extension, and, resulting from our constant interactions with these kinds of meaning, our instinctive rather than intuitive knowledge; the fresh perspectives on the questions throughout this chapter (and the rest of this thesis) provided by modern physics, and the shift from a classical to a New understanding of physics as a basis to developments throughout modernism; the paradoxical states that appear necessary to this development as possible explanation of the underlying malaise under consideration; and thus the continuing effort to assimilate these new understandings; Bohm's 'dance of the mind' as an example of a new way of seeing our subject/object relations, consistent with modern physics.

This last section of this study draws conclusions from these few chapters and their discussions, in connection with comments on the last of HICA's projects within this period of study, with Liam Gillick.

5.2 HICA residency and exhibition project:
Liam Gillick: *From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven:*
Courtyard Housing Projections
14 April – 6 October 2013
(exhibition 1 September – 6 October)

5.21 Discussion of the works and project

Liam Gillick's project at HICA occupied the gallery space for the extended period of six months. Consistent with the consideration in his works of the forming of the constructed world,¹ and of that which shapes the 'near future',² the gallery was proposed as a 'thinking' space; an area for Gillick's exploration of these concerns within the context of HICA's investigations and programmes.

Iwona Blazwick has compared the procedures focussed on in Gillick's work to the processes described by the American author Don DeLillo;

...that our contemporary passion for conspiracy theories is in part a reaction to the secularisation of our age – we fantasise about an all seeing, all knowing yet invisible authority, as powerful and ruthless as the old Jehovah. Yet in reality social and political upheavals are triggered by the chance alignments of individuals and events which are neither coordinated nor inevitable.³

This difference appears a version of the shift discussed at the end of the previous chapter, from classical to new understandings of physics, or, in-line with Deleuze and Guattari's model, from classical structures of thinking, 'the dialectical relationship to the outside in which a dichotomy between subject and object is firmly established', to the rhizomatic.⁴

1 See for instance Susanne Gaensheimer's text, *Consultation Filter* in S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen (Eds.), *Liam Gillick*, p.8

2 Ibid., p.133: in Michael Archer's essay *Parallel Structures*

3 Whitechapel Art Gallery, *Liam Gillick: The Wood Way*, p.5

4 From Susanne Gaensheimer's discussion in S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen (Eds.), *Liam Gillick*, p.10

Liam Gillick and Henry Bond, 25 April 1991, London England, 17.00, Reception to Launch Super-Commuter, Fred Finn's Ten Million Mile Trip. Roof Gardens, Kensington, 1991

Michael Archer has reflected on Gillick’s scrutinising of the processes thus involved, and suggested that, for Gillick, ‘The space within which this scrutiny is made possible is the space of art.’ Gillick’s is then a focus on ‘...how things have come to be the way they are and how, as a consequence, things might proceed from here.’⁵

Gillick’s works’ focus on the construction of our world, the constant drive to reconstruct, indicates some sense of improvement, in forming future realities.⁶ In this way he appears to equate abstraction with utopian desires;⁷ ‘It is the concretization of the abstract into a series of failed forms that lures the artist into

5 Ibid., p.132
6 From Susanne Gaensheimer’s discussion in S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen (Eds.), *Liam Gillick*, p.8
7 Liam Gillick, *Abstract*, in M. Lind, (Ed.), *Abstraction*, p.212

repeated attempts to “create” the abstract...’⁸ And he thus identifies difficulties with both abstract and concrete artworks: abstract works are the ‘representation of impossibilities’,⁹ doomed to failure in attempting to ‘capture an unobtainable state of things’.¹⁰ Concrete works, on the other hand, ‘concretize the concrete’,¹¹ which, Gillick says, is simply evasion.¹² Failing to satisfy the striving for the abstract it offers ‘half-facts’, which, despite this strategy, still continue to allude to the abstract.¹³

Liam Gillick, (*The What If? Scenario*) *Second Stage Discussion Platform and Surface Designs*, 1996

8 Ibid., p.211
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p.213
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.

He then further determines the space for art as a ‘striving for a state of abstraction’,¹⁴ where the abstract, Gillick suggests, ‘in the current aesthetic regime – always finds form as a relational backdrop to other activities’.¹⁵ This point became pivotal in our consideration of this project. HICA and this study have sought to understand this same backdrop in terms of a developing history of ideas of Concrete Art, suggesting the potential for seeing it as something concrete in-itself.

Gillick’s project, titled *From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections* took ‘...as its starting point a consideration of two important low-rise high density housing projects.’¹⁶ These were Jørn Utzon’s *Fredensborg Housing* (1963) in Zealand, Denmark, and Atelier 5’s *Halen Estate* (1957-1961) near Berne in Switzerland.¹⁷ In connection with these, Gillick stated his work’s frequent focus on the,

semiotics of the built world – examining structures that were proposed as “functional utopias” and producing revised forms that accentuate the aspects of attempted development with particular focus upon revision, renovation and attempts to control the near future and the recent past.¹⁸

Both the Fredensborg and Halen projects ‘...sited high-density walled housing within natural landscape.’ and function ‘...as experimental housing models and abstract forms in their own right.’¹⁹

A series of architectural drawings were produced as prints in the gallery, which were seen in the context of a commentary by Gillick, played, as if live, through a radio in HICA’s larger and otherwise empty space. This commentary described ‘... for an imagined visitor to HICA, the space and arrangement of works, the thought processes as route to the production of these works, and as response to the context of HICA, its programme, the nature of the space and residency.’²⁰ Given its background noises and inclusion of various random sections from operas, this

14 Ibid., p.211

15 Ibid., p.212

16 See the project’s press release; Appendix A

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 My and Eilidh Crumlish’s comment in HICA, *Liam Gillick: From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections*, p.7

soundtrack formed more of a sound-piece than straight commentary.

Liam Gillick, *From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections*, installation view, 2013

Archer’s comments on earlier architectural drawings by Gillick seem equally applicable here.²¹ Archer describes their resemblance to the ‘international modernism that one associates with Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and with the general principles of Constructivism and De Stijl’ but points out that,

closer inspection reveals slight errors, imperfections and structural solecisms. Roofs don’t quite meet walls, for example, in a manner that condemns the design to an existence purely on paper ... Gillick’s

21 See S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen (Eds.), *Liam Gillick*, p.131

buildings are unrealizable in the strict sense, yet what they concern, the consideration of space, volume, the intersection of planes, openings and closures, habitation, business, security, safety and so on, are no less present as material for discussion as a result.²²

Liam Gillick, *From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections*, drawings (details), 2013

22 Ibid.

What Archer suggests is clear in these drawings is the ‘...desire to treat the events of history, not as things that are merely past and gone... but as elements that are more directly usable in the processes of thinking and acting within the present.’²³

In similar manner then the project specifically considered relations to historical concerns, in the context of HICA and the Fredensborg and Halen housing projects, suggesting HICA as ‘... an Institute that is, has a commitment to...in a way a kind of...the application of an applied geometry as a series of semi-autonomous systems, that sit in relation to the surroundings, or the surrounding context’.²⁴ It thus reflected on this relation; HICA’s and these other projects’ situating in regard to Nature or the ‘spiritual’, for instance; the objective world or the human and idealised, to ask, which informs our interpretations in respect of the ‘semiotics of the built world’? How do the elements present, the current nature and state of the HICA space and Gillick’s project, form understandings which may then lead to possible futures?

Alongside the series of prints and Gillick’s commentary the idea was also developed with ourselves, in a typically collaborative fashion for Gillick,²⁵ of a spoken Gaelic translation of his commentary, made available within the gallery space (and later alongside the English transcription in the project’s resulting publication). This particular inclusion perhaps makes much more apparent the potential for the further (subjective) extrapolation of meanings in relation to the project’s focus on this sense of semiotics, in its presenting of a ‘correspondence between commentary and imagery, language and landscape’.²⁶

In this way, the project provided a very focused moment for consideration of the various paradoxical relations encountered through HICA’s overall project; between Man and Nature, mind and matter, art and objecthood, Classical and New, and so on, enabling our purposeful reflection on the processes through which we position ourselves, as constituent parts of the here and now.

23 Ibid.

24 Gillick’s comment in HICA, *Liam Gillick: From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections* p.26

25 See Blazwick’s comment for instance in Whitechapel Art Gallery, *Liam Gillick: The Wood Way*, p.5

26 HICA, *Liam Gillick: From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections*, p.7

5.3 A quacrete proposal

In the particular context of Gillick's project my concluding comments also form something of a proposal. This proposal is in accord with my conclusions, determined through the curatorial activity of the HICA project and this study in particular, which I will continue to outline through the remainder of this section.

The proposal aims to encapsulate that which may provide a consistent basis to a notion of a 'concrete' art: it develops the exploration through this thesis of the influence of ideas of a Concrete art in current practice. It intends to reassert a Concrete art's relevance to contemporary art, through providing a wholly concrete (if complex) conception of art-making.

In making this proposal, I am very aware of its tentative nature. I consider it acting as one 'upward streamer' (the term from my earlier discussion of this phenomenon in the formation of lightning²⁷); a possible way forward; an opener to a conversation; something that may enable further formations. As indicated by the title of this section, the proposal is of a 'quacrete' art. This is a term that has occurred to me through musing on the issues the study has thrown up. It is not the only possibility that has occurred, but it is the one that has, so far, stuck best.

The quacrete (its 'quan-' from 'quantum'; '-crete', from 'concrete'²⁸) essentially denotes the concrete, modifying its meaning, as with its sound, only slightly. It thus intends a realignment, developing its 'new' rather than 'classical' associations in terms of materiality. In this way its substantiality is perhaps quite different from what we might expect of the 'concrete'; it is thus physicalist:²⁹ considering all to be

²⁷ See section 2.87

²⁸ The Oxford English Reference Dictionary gives the meaning of quantum as from Latin *quantus* 'how much', and '-crete', from *crescere*, as 'grow'. J. Pearsall. & B. Trumble, (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, pp.1179;300. In proposing this term I do not intend this etymology to present a precise meaning, in-itself, though it may perhaps be taken to indicate a basic physicality, in the sense of some 'quantized' thing, which is then also proposed as having a dynamic nature.

²⁹ Accepting the competing, and developing formulations of physicalist philosophies (i.e. as outlined by A. Melnyk, *A Physicalist Manifesto: Thoroughly Modern Materialism*, pp.2-5) - Andrew Melnyk, for example, suggests that his own formulation of a 'realization' physicalism '...can simply be thought of as a generalisation of... the claim that everything of a kind that is not mentioned as such in fundamental physics is nevertheless purely physical...'. Ibid., p.7

ultimately of the same, what we understand as physical, order. In this way it also indicates beyond the 'quantized', to reflect the apparent likelihood of fundamental energy being, as Heisenberg considers, 'universal matter'.³⁰

'Quacrete' is an intentionally ad-hoc term, matching its purposefully tentative nature: it is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, aware of its absurdity (as with the relating of art to science generally, variously discussed, it is alert to potential dangers in aligning an interest in quantum mechanics with the procedures of contemporary art). I wish to highlight therefore its intention as an artistic identification, which recognises its distance from science, but still concludes its reliance on, and development in connection with, the evidence of the workings of Nature provided by modern physics.

I thus also present it, in-line with the trajectory suggested by van Doesburg, as an understanding of the development of artworks through the Modern period, that seeks to maintain and develop this progression, and gives explanation to what continues to be made, and why. In this the term is offered as a beginning of a search for better, more appropriate terminology, as something, for now, applicable at all points through this study where there currently seems no adequate alternative: instead of the 'immaterial' or 'dematerialized' for instance; the quacrete (or at least the quacrete might stand for the state Heisenberg notes, beyond interpretation in our classical language). It is thus intended to offer a definite development from the position reached in the comment of Robert Barry's; 'The pieces are actual but not concrete'.³¹

5.31 Relation of quacrete to quantum

While this identification is in one way very closely connected to concerns of modern physics, its focus remains on artistic involvement in our everyday life and engagements with our surroundings. Our own behaviours, determined through this same physics (though admitting our classical distance, in our comprehension), are considered as indicative or revealing of its workings. Its sense of involvement

³⁰ 'All the elementary particles are made of the same substance, which we may call energy or universal matter; they are just different forms in which matter can appear'. W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.107

³¹ L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.113

is then ‘real’; necessary and substantial (thus its stress on plastic meaning for instance, of works’ involvements in real space and time, and such things as the active interpretation of works by their audience).

Further to this, as part of its efforts toward more conscious understanding, it may then engage concepts directly from modern physics. I will therefore discuss some of these concepts here as helpful in developing a sense of its reflections, while not presenting them as, in-themselves, a basis to this proposal’s artistic procedures. Naturally, I am also only able to give the very briefest summary of some of these concepts in this conclusion. These comments are thus intended primarily to illustrate how the physics they describe may be engaged by works in this study.

5.4 Reflections on the results from ‘two-slit’ experiments

The Standard Model, a loose framework³² combining insights from relativity and quantum mechanics, enabling the systematising, categorising and thus closer investigating of subatomic particles and the forces that act upon them (gravitational, electromagnetic, and the strong and weak nuclear forces), remains the orthodoxy in current physics, although it is known to be incomplete.³³ While quantum mechanics provides an incredibly accurate means of predicting and explaining the behaviours of atoms and subatomic particles,³⁴ and has led to an ‘...almost complete understanding of how subatomic particles interact with each other and connect up to form the world we see around us...’ there equally remains something obscure in its workings: the theory of quantum mechanics itself may be a ‘beautifully accurate and logical mathematical construction’, but that which it describes appears only understandable in ways that seem ‘weird and illogical’.³⁵

Heisenberg briefly discusses this illogicality in the example of a ‘two-slit’ experiment³⁶ (a version of Thomas Young’s experiment, that Jim Al-Khalili

32 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.191

33 Ibid. Further clarification on this point was gained through discussion with Prof. Mervyn Rose, University of Dundee. M. Rose (2012) Meeting with the author.

34 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.ix

35 Ibid.

36 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, pp.19-20

variously discusses in greater detail³⁷). This experiment immediately presents difficulties in understanding through what appears the dual nature of atoms: at times, when passing through the two slits presented in the experiment, atoms will behave as particles, and at other times, as waves. What is more startling is that atoms switch their behaviour in apparent response to the set-up of the experiment, and the presence of an observer or measuring device.³⁸ Heisenberg states that this leads to very strange results, ‘...since it seems to indicate that the observation plays a decisive role in the event and that the reality varies, depending upon whether we observe it or not.’³⁹

Illustration of a two-slit experiment:

Atoms are fired through one at a time. They, individually, develop an interference pattern, which should only appear due to a wave-like process passing through both slits. If leaving the gun as a localized particle and hitting the screen at a definite point, how do they also pass through both slits at once?

(From Al-Khalili)

37 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.31

38 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.20

39 Ibid.

Al-Khalili explains the outcomes from variations on this experiment, to further highlight the strangeness of its demonstration ‘of the way in which the quantum phenomenon known as “superposition” manifests itself’.⁴⁰ Differing set-ups and observations reveal the atoms to behave at the start and end-points of the experiment as ‘localized’ particles, but on encountering the slits, to behave like a spread-out wave, going partly through both and each part ‘emerging from a slit and interfering with the other on the other side’.⁴¹ If detectors are set, to see which slit the atom passes through, then the atoms only ever pass through one slit, as a particle.⁴² These results suggest that ‘...the atom can somehow be aware of the detector hiding behind one of the slits ready to catch it in the act of its spread-out state’.⁴³ Switching the detector off ‘...and therefore having no knowledge of which slit the atom has passed through – allows the interference pattern to build up again’⁴⁴ (from repeated atoms passing through and behaving as waves). This further demonstrates that it is not the physical presence of the detector, but the act of observing that causes the change: ‘It is only when the atom is being watched that it remains as a particle throughout. Clearly the act of observing the atom is crucial.’⁴⁵ Even setting the detector to delay its detection till after the atom has passed through the slits determines that the atom will only pass through as a particle.⁴⁶

Here Al-Khalili considers the difficulties in trying to explain these occurrences. The logic that might provide a satisfactory explanation to our common-sense notions is shown to be wanting. ‘Physicists have been forced to admit that... there is no rational way out. We can explain what we see but not why.’⁴⁷ However strange its predictions, it is not the theory of quantum mechanics itself that is strange to us, it is ‘...rather Nature herself that insists on such a strange kind of reality on the microscopic scale.’⁴⁸

40 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.15

41 Ibid., p.7

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., pp.7-9

44 Ibid., p.11

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., pp.11-12

47 Ibid., p.13

48 Ibid.

Illustration of a two-slit experiment with a detector:

Above: the interference pattern disappears with a detector in place

Below: with the detector turned off the interference pattern returns

(From Al-Khalili)

The interpretations and conclusions drawn from these observations are most pertinent to consideration here in relation to artistic procedures. The Copenhagen interpretation remains the standard interpretation of quantum mechanics, formulated by Niels Bohr and the group of physicists, including Heisenberg, working at Bohr’s Copenhagen institute through the mid-to-late 1920s.⁴⁹ This interpretation suggests that,

we can never describe a quantum system independently of a measuring apparatus. It is a meaningless question to ask about the state of the system in the absence of the measuring device, since we can only ever

49 Ibid., p.122

learn something about the system if we take it in conjunction with the device we use to look at it.⁵⁰

The role of the observer is thus made central: atoms remain suspended in their state of superposition until we choose to look. ‘In this way, certain properties of the quantum system are only endowed with reality at the moment of measurement. Before that, they cannot even be said to exist in a definite classical sense...’⁵¹ The act of measuring brings the atom into contact with the macroscopic measuring device which causes the quantum system to jump from ‘...a combination of potential properties to one actual outcome’ (a jump that Heisenberg termed the ‘collapse of its wavefunction’).⁵²

5.41 Differing interpretations: Copenhagen and de Broglie-Bohm

Al-Khalili states some dissatisfaction with these implications from the Copenhagen interpretation.⁵³ It, for instance ‘... only [allows] those questions to be posed which concern the results of measurements’,⁵⁴ which ultimately gives the observer ‘...such a privileged status’ that it ‘denies the existence of an objective reality that exists in the absence of observation’.⁵⁵ He refers to Jim Cushing’s argument that it is only the standard interpretation ‘because it came along first and was advocated by stronger personalities’.⁵⁶

Al-Khalili thus also presents alongside this the alternative of the de Broglie-Bohm interpretation, which, he notes, does ‘...not make any different measurable predictions about the subatomic world’, it ‘does not require any additions made to the equations of quantum mechanics’⁵⁷ but rather differs in its underlying physics – its meaning.⁵⁸ This interpretation begins with the idea of Louis de Broglie’s, that the wavefunction might be a real physical wave,⁵⁹ an idea developed by Bohm

50 Ibid., p.123
51 Ibid., p.126
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., pp.126-127
54 Ibid., p.126
55 Ibid., 128
56 Ibid., p.133
57 Ibid., p.130
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., p.129

in the 1950s, suggesting that ‘the wavefunction was not simply a mathematical entity but a real physical presence’,⁶⁰ explaining the interference from the two-slits by way of a ‘quantum potential’⁶¹ that guides the path of the atom, which always remains as a particle, through only one slit.⁶² Atoms are thus ‘definite, localized particles at all times’,⁶³ which,

despite it restoring the old idea of determinism to nature... is not a return to Newton’s clockwork universe. It is fundamentally impossible for us to ever control the initial conditions for any given particle such that we are able to predict its definite trajectory, since any such attempt will cause a change to the quantum potential.⁶⁴

While Al-Khalili further discusses this interpretation’s attendant problems, principally around nonlocality,⁶⁵ he also states that supporters of this interpretation ‘point out that what it gives back to us is nothing less than reality itself.’⁶⁶

Al-Khalili notes a commonly held ‘shut up and calculate’ position among physicists, in regard to these questions,⁶⁷ an acceptance of the bizarreness while using the theory’s, in practice, ‘tremendous predictive power’.⁶⁸ This state Al-Khalili suggests is essentially positivist, ‘...rooted in the philosophy of “logical positivism” that happened to be popular in Europe at the time that quantum mechanics was born’.⁶⁹

It is notable here though that Heisenberg states very clearly that quantum theory is not positivistic.⁷⁰ He suggests positivism rests on the ‘sensual perceptions of the observer as the elements of reality’ where the Copenhagen interpretation states that what we understand as ‘actual’, the foundations of any physical

60 Ibid., p.130
61 Ibid., p.131
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., p.132
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., pp.132-133
66 Ibid., p.130
67 Ibid., p.119
68 Ibid., p.120
69 Ibid.
70 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.95

interpretation, can only be stated in classical terms.⁷¹ Thus, ‘any knowledge of the “actual” is – because of the quantum-theoretical laws – by its very nature an incomplete knowledge’.⁷² Here his criticisms are particularly aimed at the ‘ontology of materialism’, which rests ‘...upon the illusion that the kind of existence, the direct “actuality” of the world around us, can be extrapolated into the atomic range. This extrapolation is impossible, however’.⁷³ In this way, the collapsing of the wavefunction is not a step from one actuality to another in a continual, physical, development (suggesting the determinism essential to Newtonian physics⁷⁴), but rather a more fundamental transition ‘from the “possible” to the “actual”’.⁷⁵

Heisenberg thus distinguishes between the subjectivity that might place the individual subject at the centre of their world, and the much lesser, general human subjectivity apparent in the setting up of an experiment to observe nature as object in the first place:

This again emphasizes a subjective element in the description of atomic events, since the measuring device has been constructed by the observer, and we have to remember that what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning.⁷⁶

Heisenberg’s quoting Weizsäcker, ‘Nature is earlier than man, but man is earlier than natural science’⁷⁷ attests, not to his disbelief in the physical world, but to the distance he sees between our, especially scientific, interpretations, and the world.

These differing interpretations demonstrate that their significant implications regarding the exact nature of the quantum world are still contested and the matter of continuing research.⁷⁸ What they do confirm is a very different nature, in terms of the ‘material’, from that formed by atoms moving within a void: Heisenberg, for instance, discusses our development of this conception of matter from ancient

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.46

75 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.22

76 Ibid., pp.24-25

77 Ibid., p.23

78 Al-Khalili presents various examples of recent and on-going developments in his chapter *Into the New Millenium*, in J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp.234-263

Greek philosophies, especially those of Democritus and Leucippus, who first formulated the idea of atoms as essentially inert ‘building blocks of matter’⁷⁹ and which, with Leucippus, suggested a ‘complete determinism’.⁸⁰

At the quantum level there is instead an unpredictability that is a ‘fundamental feature of nature itself’.⁸¹ ‘We cannot predict with certainty what will happen next in the quantum world – not because our theories are not good enough or because we lack sufficient information, but because Nature herself operates in a very ‘unpindownable’ way.’⁸² Einstein, as example, held the view that we could go beyond quantum mechanics, to develop a fuller understanding that might then remove this unpredictability:

[Einstein] could not accept... that our world is, at its most fundamental level, inherently unpredictable. Indeed, one of Einstein’s most famous quotes is that he did not believe “that God plays dice”, in the sense that he could not accept that Nature is probabilistic. However, Einstein was wrong.⁸³

These several points, giving an extremely brief summary of some concepts of quantum mechanics, still present current, authoritative, yet differing interpretations of the physical nature of the world, and of our relation to it. Thus their concepts, and their discussion, may be taken to reflect on central concerns in this thesis. For example, they may be directly applicable to consideration of the question of delineation between ourselves and the world, developed generally through HICA’s programme: here then Al-Khalili’s assertion that the placing of ‘the dividing line between measured and measurer at the level of human consciousness’ amounts ‘to what philosophers refer to as solipsism – the idea that the observer is at the centre of the universe and that everything else is just a figment of his or her imagination’,⁸⁴ and Heisenberg’s position, where we may ‘know that the city of London exists whether we see it or not’,⁸⁵ but, at quantum scales, he suggests, speaking about ‘parts of the world without any reference to ourselves’

79 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.31

80 Ibid., p.32

81 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.46

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., p.47

84 Ibid., p.108

85 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.22

becomes impossible.⁸⁶ Heisenberg thus declares an acceptance of our objective and classical worldview ‘as far as possible’,⁸⁷ stating a delineation only between our macroscopic world of understanding and the particular quantum states and processes.⁸⁸ The exact nature of this boundary thus remains open in physics, advancing concepts through theories that may be seen as immediately relevant to the work of artists here, such as Eloi Puig, Daniel Spoerri, and Thomson and Craighead.

As with these artists’ works, I suggest the quancrete seeks to find means of exploring our own lived experience of these states. It develops a strategy something like ‘self-similarity’, an old and largely discredited idea in science, that has found new applications in looking at complex systems, such as in Chaos theory, noting the likeness of patterns produced by Nature at various shifts of scale.⁸⁹ James Gleick has suggested our seeing and interpreting of these patterns as an ‘eagerness of the mind to find analogies in experience’, some of which, in science, have now been seen to be ‘productive’.⁹⁰ These artworks, by this, operate as parallel examples, while still being ‘real’ instances of these workings in-themselves: as with Michael Archer’s observation of Gillick’s architectural or journalistic modes of practice: providing an open space for consideration, focused on how we actually proceed; again, ‘directly usable in the processes of thinking and acting within the present.’⁹¹

The implication from these artworks is that questions relating to quantum mechanics are ‘self-similar’ to our experience of routinely negotiated circumstances and decision-making processes. This may seem to imply a mechanism where, for instance, if consciousness is found to be reliant on quantum processes, as with Penrose’s research, consciousness in general may in some way be an interface between our scale of experience and the quantum. Crucially, through their actual form these works also develop these connections beyond the metaphorical: whether or not they are correct in their speculation or relation to quantum mechanics, they function as occurrences, as part of the objective world that may then be subject to the experiments determining the theory. Thus the great

86 Ibid., pp.22-23

87 Ibid., p.23

88 Ibid., pp.24-25

89 J. Gleick, *Chaos*, pp.115-116

90 Ibid., p.116

91 S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen (Eds.), *Liam Gillick*, p.131

importance of their being actual and concrete, whatever that may, finally, be.

The initial reading of my example of the allotments, as a schema outlining positions of the more and less rational and intuitive, may, by all this, be suggested as a ‘classical’ interpretation of positioning processes: seeming to provide a superficial schema of values, useful in navigating our day-to-day lives. Closer consideration actually indicates the complexities and uncertainties involved, what Jerry Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini have discussed, in their study of evolutionary theory, as ‘multi-level’ causes of actions.⁹² Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini, judge Newtonian mechanics to be perhaps the extreme example of ‘single-level’ theories,⁹³ in which, in regard to the subjects of the theory ‘...all the theory “knows about them” (the parameters in terms of which the laws of the theory apply) are their locations and velocities and the forces acting upon them’.⁹⁴ They consider to what extent Darwin’s theories may also be understood as ‘single-level’,⁹⁵ and in contrast suggest complex processes of evolution actually develop through multi-level operations:

An explanation of why Napoleon did what he did at Waterloo may advert simultaneously to his age, his upbringing, his social class and his personality type, to say nothing of his prior military experience, his psychological state, the weather and how much caffeine there was in his morning coffee.⁹⁶

A similarly multi-level consideration of the allotment example reflects from the overall presentation of the plots to the concretization of individual plots through the sum of actions; the individual personalities, circumstances and motivations of the plot-holders, in combination with the nature of their precise area of ground and any wider environmental effects. The quancrete here logically extends this dialogue between plot and plot-holder down to effects at quantum scales; ultimately the same implication of ‘the microscopic structure of the whole world’⁹⁷ in any close observation, as with any subatomic experiment⁹⁸ (for instance, considering how

92 J. Fodor & M. Piattelli-Palmarini, *What Darwin Got Wrong*, p.xxi

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., p.xxii

96 Ibid., p.xxi

97 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.21

98 Ibid.

a factor such as the exact, and microscopic, composition of the soil would have immediate significance in the resulting form of the plots).

A further example here would be Bourriaud's comments on Rirkrit Tiravanija's procedures in his artworks: 'Occasionally the artist brings "lots of people" together... who, according to Tiravanija, are all part of his installation and whom he incorporates into the list of materials present in his works.'⁹⁹ This procedure seems to place the audience in the role of the measuring device, as the extension into the rest of the world via the experiment of the artwork. Bourriaud makes this comment in arguing against an opposing tendency, exemplified in Fried's writing.¹⁰⁰ Fried and also Greenberg's views (and he suggests those following them, such as Claire Bishop¹⁰¹) desire for works to exist in a "continual and perpetual present",¹⁰² outside of their temporality. By extension of the analogy I make here, Fried's view is strictly 'classical', believing in the objectivity of laws that transcend space and time, existing irrespective of their audience.

I intend this discussion and these examples to provide a fuller picture of the extent of a 'relational backdrop' to artworks, stating its extreme complexity. These do not, due to this complexity, then become 'abstract'. They, on the contrary, may be seen to be profoundly concrete. There may be an impossibility of objective description, of our saying exactly what "happens"¹⁰³ in how 'things have come to be the way they are and how, as a consequence, things might proceed from here'¹⁰⁴ but as artwork and not science this is a lesser concern. The artworks remain focused on their fascination with the fact that things are as they are, and that they may be changed. There is an unavoidable certainty in the positions we occupy, but an absolute uncertainty, considering even our own multi-level motivations, as to exactly why and how we do: opinions and conclusions are still formed, arguments made, and reality constructed.

I suggest therefore that the point in the end of my allotment example is its illustration of complex 'quancrete' processes of formation and positioning: a concretization

99 Liam Gillick: *One Long Walk... Two Short Piers...*, p.17

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid. Bourriaud quotes Fried.

103 See Heisenberg's comments on description, for instance: W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.19

104 Archer in S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen (Eds.), *Liam Gillick*, p.132

through engaging the uncertain and what seems to us at least, the random.¹⁰⁵ In this light, I would also present the criticism Gillick levels at Claire Bishop's discussion of Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics: Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*: her essay remains 'content to keep pointing out cartoon variations of power relationships, while the true complexity at the heart of our culture is allowed to mutate and consume relationships regardless.'¹⁰⁶ Simplistic characterisations of those presumed to be closer to and further removed from the 'real', more or less Rational or Intuitive, appear a blinkeredness that may ultimately be open to Lippard's accusation of an 'extended racism'.¹⁰⁷ Instead, for Gillick, 'things get truly interesting when art goes beyond a reflection of the rejected choices of the dominant culture and attempts to address the actual processes that shape our contemporary environment'.¹⁰⁸

5.42 Decoherence

The process of decoherence, described by quantum theory, appears a further very useful parallel here, providing development in this discussion. 'Decoherence is a real physical process that is going on everywhere all the time', explains Al-Khalili.¹⁰⁹ 'It takes place whenever a quantum system is no longer isolated from its surrounding macroscopic environment and its wavefunction becomes entangled with the complicated state of this environment'.¹¹⁰ That is, quantum systems existing in superpositions, such as single atoms, lose their superpositions and fall into line with larger and more ordered structures they encounter.¹¹¹

Al-Khalili notes that decoherence is 'still an area of active research' and not yet fully understood,¹¹² though he suggests it begins to provide some answers to the

105 See David Bohm's note on ideas of 'randomness', for instance, suggesting disorder as a misconception from our human viewpoint, of things on a scale we generally cannot perceive. D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.149

106 L. Gillick, (2006) *Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"*, p.99

107 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, p.9

108 L. Gillick, (2006) *Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"*, p.100

109 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.114

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., p.115

problem of measurement.¹¹³

Erwin Schrödinger's thought experiment, known as 'Schrödinger's Cat', is a means of up-scaling a quantum superposition to our scale of experience, in order to question the notion of superposition itself.¹¹⁴ Al-Khalili describes it thus:

Schrödinger asked what would happen if we were to shut a cat in a box with a device containing a lethal poison and a radioactive atomic nucleus. The particle emitted by the nucleus when it decays triggers a mechanism that releases the poison into the box, and the cat is killed instantly... the moment of decay of a radioactive nucleus... cannot, even in principle, be predicted exactly.¹¹⁵

After closing the lid of the box then, the atomic nucleus can only be described by a quantum superposition, and the situation inside the box rest on probabilities shifting over time.¹¹⁶ Here '...Schrödinger followed the letter of the (quantum) law' which correlates, through their wavefunctions, the fate of the cat with the radioactive nucleus, describing the two by an entangled state: 'Therefore the cat's wavefunction will also unavoidably split into a superposition of two states: one describing a live cat, and the other a dead cat!'¹¹⁷ The real significance of Schrödinger's analogy is that it directly parallels what is said to occur in the two-slit experiment. To say the cat is necessarily either dead or alive is 'equivalent to saying that the atom goes through one slit or the other'.¹¹⁸ The absurdity of our current explanations is thus Schrödinger's point.¹¹⁹

In regard to this problem Al-Khalili suggests that Bohr and Heisenberg

...did not claim that the cat was really both dead and alive at the same time. They insisted instead that – and this has been accepted by the majority of physicists ever since – we cannot talk about the cat as even

113 Ibid.
 114 Ibid., p.104
 115 Ibid.
 116 Ibid., pp.104-105
 117 Ibid., p.105
 118 Ibid.
 119 Ibid.

having an independent reality until we open the box to check up on it!¹²⁰

Here though the more recent research on decoherence suggests the real 'reason we never see Schrödinger's cat both dead and alive at the same time is because decoherence takes place within the box long before we open it'.¹²¹ It is the decoherence from microscopic to macroscopic in the device housing the radioactive nucleus itself, which shifts from a state of quantum superposition to something more ordered at our scale.¹²²

Schrödinger has discussed quantum processes through considering the incorporating of the unpredictable movements of individual atoms into larger and more ordered structures, and the difficulties that surround these differences of scale. He starts from the question 'Why are atoms so small?'¹²³ or, he more precisely asks, why are we so large in relation to them?¹²⁴ Here he suggests there is a necessary separation. Our sense organs, for instance, are of a scale such that they will be unaffected by the impacts of single atoms, 'If it were not so, if we were organisms so sensitive that a single atom, or even a few atoms, could make a perceptible impression on our senses – Heavens, what would life be like!'¹²⁵ Our being organisms on the scale we are is thus due to the requirements of preventing interference from the atomic scale, and from a necessity for order in our various functions: in such processes as thought, for instance, where he takes the brain and its relation to our sense organs as particular example.¹²⁶ Here 'the physical interactions between our system and others must, as a rule, themselves possess a certain degree of physical orderliness, that is to say, they too must obey strict physical laws to a certain degree of accuracy'.¹²⁷ Individual atoms performing 'all the time a completely disorderly heat motion'¹²⁸ are thus necessarily incorporated: 'only in the co-operation of an enormously large number of atoms do statistical laws begin to operate and control the behaviour of these assemblées with an accuracy increasing as the number of atoms involved increases.'¹²⁹

120 Ibid., pp.105-106
 121 Ibid., p.115
 122 Ibid.
 123 E. Schrödinger, *What is Life?*, p.6
 124 Ibid., pp.7-9
 125 Ibid., p.8
 126 Ibid., p.9
 127 Ibid., p.10
 128 Ibid.
 129 Ibid.

Here then there is a necessary difference in behaviours between the world at the atomic scale, and at our human scale.

Again, as this is a physical process that we are immersed in, perhaps we have some innate awareness of it: a sense of interface between these scales. An observation, such as that of my allotment example, might accept these differing scales working in some co-ordination: actions developed from the micro- to the macroscopic; our interventions into the state of the world formed through a decoherence process, in which we may be walking instances of some ‘Schrödinger’s Cat’ up-scaling; forming certainty from possibility; enabling actuality.

I suggest a desire also to see, to consider artistically, a further ‘self-similarity’ here, where we might observe our own individual chaotic behaviours falling into line with larger and more ordered structures, paralleling the processes described by Schrödinger: a greater scale of decoherence, experienced in our own lives. This sense may be directly related to discussion of our subconscious involvements in the world, as exemplified by the works of Doug Fishbone or Camila Sposati, our consideration of apparent unwitting behaviours of creatures such as termites or krill, or of connections between the geological and the anthropological; our own awareness of when we similarly appear subject to larger determining forces. (By which, aside our (always imperfect) maps, our general sense of direction, of progress, may appear the result of our being part of the wider progress of the world.) Perhaps in absolute isolation we might experience freedom from such forces, except (and where the work of John Cage, for example, seems consistent with the implications of quantum mechanics), that can never be the case. There is no ‘silence’,¹³⁰ no objectively neutral, unqualified, space: we can never be isolated from the rest of the world. It is this impossibility of isolation that I suggest is the real ground of our habitual and instinctual understandings, in which we are always ‘decohered’ to some extent.

While this is thus not ‘objective’, this non-isolation states the opposite of our experience of subjective separation, of Man from Nature. Our conceptual selves might be suggested here to instead forge some ‘superposition’ from out of this apparent unity, a ‘superposition’ between our own sense of individuality and our

¹³⁰ ‘there is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time.’ J. Cage, *Silence*, p.8, or p.191: ‘there is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound.’

necessary involvements with the rest of the world. Bourriaud has commented on Robert Filliou’s sense of a Venn diagram between art and life; creating an area of overlap, that generates the “spark” of interest.¹³¹ To develop the analogy here, this ‘transitive’ superposition of self-consciousness is then lost when we ‘decohere’, swept along within a ‘superior whole’: again Nietzsche’s comments, quoted earlier; ‘Consciousness is born in relation to a being of which we could be a function; it is the means by which we incorporate into that being.’¹³² Our sense of separation may then be implied as a necessity of life, an engineered vantage point, through which to gain some (quantum potential?) perspective, necessary in the process of development. Perhaps the superposition of atoms is some manifestation of an equivalent (self-similar) need?

Here Hegel’s sense of the absolute prompts a further view of this, as an emphasis on the process of subject/object separation itself. Žižek’s discussion of this process of the absolute considers its introduction of a ‘gap or cut into the given and immediate substantial unity, the power of differentiating, of “abstracting”, of tearing apart and treating as self-standing what in reality is part of an organic unity’.¹³³

The paradox is thus that there is no self that precedes Spirit’s “self-alienation”: the very process of alienation creates/generates the “self” from which Spirit is alienated and to which it returns... In other words, Spirit’s return-to-itself creates the very dimension to which it returns.¹³⁴

Here the suggestion is that this process generates, not something out of nothing, but something out of an ‘organic unity’. The difference to this idea that this thesis and study – the quacrete – might be proposing, is that this is not then specific to Mankind, as something particular about our human ‘spirit’, but is perhaps a general feature (perhaps at all scales) of that organic unity, and which is perhaps that unity’s overall focus. While thus still considering the greater importance of the organic unity (as the ground of the process and as the process itself), it might remain in general agreement that:

¹³¹ Comment made in Bourriaud’s lecture: N. Bourriaud, *On Filliou*

¹³² See section 4.52

¹³³ S. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p.231

¹³⁴ Ibid.

...the subject is also not just a secondary accidental appendix or outgrowth of some pre-subjective substantial reality: there is no substantial Being to which the subject can return, no encompassing organic Order of Being in which the subject has to find its proper place. "Reconciliation" between subject and substance means acceptance of this radical lack of any firm foundational point: the subject is not its own origin, it is secondary, dependent upon its substantial presuppositions; but these presuppositions do not have a substantial consistency of their own and are always retroactively posited. The only "absolute" is thus the process itself...¹³⁵

5.43 The nature of substance

Kandinsky has asked, 'Is everything material? Or is everything spiritual? ...Thought which, although a product of the spirit, can be defined with positive science, is matter, but of fine and not coarse substance. Is whatever cannot be touched by the hand, spiritual?'¹³⁶

Here, in relation to Kandinsky's consideration, this study finds an answer in the confirmation from modern physics of the universe as a unity of substance, though it still reflects on the nature of that substance, as with Heisenberg's identification of energy as universal matter and rejection of the 'ontology of materialism'; stating inevitable distance between ourselves and knowledge of this substance, and its difference from what we may envisage as material reality.

In some ways the atomic bomb is a dramatic proof of the theory of unity of matter and energy, and thus confirms a scientific, physical, monism.¹³⁷ Though there remains a sense that physics may still have only just 'scratched the surface', that there is still a real 'who knows', with recent speculation around the nature's and prevalence of dark energy and dark matter, for instance, highlighting the limits of our understanding, and indicating how much else there remains to explain.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ibid., 229

¹³⁶ In his footnote (3), in W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p.9

¹³⁷ Heisenberg explains the physical and chemical reactions involved in this example in more detail. W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, pp.73-74

¹³⁸ Comments from discussion with Prof. Mervyn Rose: M. Rose, (2012) Meeting with the author.

In this situation the quacrete is happy to wait and see what science might prove: it makes no definite claim. It is a proposition 'for now', which foresees the possibility of radical change in the light of discoveries elsewhere, though it still judges a 'physical' monism (as with that of energy), as the most likely case.

Again, it notes the significance in the development away from a view, taken to originate with Democritus, of 'the whole of reality' as 'constituted of nothing but "atomic building blocks", all working together more or less mechanically'¹³⁹ and toward an integrated and non-deterministic modern view.

Bohm says here that relativity as well as quantum theory imply an 'undivided wholeness':

What is meant here by wholeness could be indicated metaphorically by calling attention to a pattern (e.g. in a carpet)... it has no meaning to say that different parts of such a pattern... are separate objects in interaction. Similarly, in the quantum context, one can regard terms like 'observed object', 'observing instrument', 'link electron', 'experimental results', etc., as aspects of a single overall 'pattern' that are in effect abstracted or 'pointed out' by our mode of description... A centrally relevant change in descriptive order required in the quantum theory is thus the dropping of the notion of analysis of the world into relatively autonomous parts, separately existent but in interaction. Rather, the primary emphasis is now on undivided wholeness, in which the observing instrument is not separable from what is observed.¹⁴⁰

Heisenberg interestingly discusses Heraclitus' philosophy, stating that 'modern physics is in some way extremely near to the doctrines of Heraclitus'.¹⁴¹ Heraclitus, seeking to 'reconcile the idea of one fundamental principle with the infinite variety of phenomena'¹⁴² solves this by recognizing that the 'strife of the opposites is really a kind of harmony'.¹⁴³ He thus makes 'fire', representative of the 'concept of Becoming', the basic element.¹⁴⁴ The 'tension between the One and the Many'

¹³⁹ D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.11

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.169

¹⁴¹ W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.29

¹⁴² Ibid., p.28

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.29

leads Heraclitus to the idea of ‘change itself’ as the fundamental principle. ‘But the change in itself is not a material cause and therefore is represented in the philosophy of Heraclitus by the fire as the basic element, which is both matter and a moving force’.¹⁴⁵ Heisenberg suggests if we replace Heraclitus’ ‘fire’ with ‘energy’,

we can almost repeat his statements word for word from our modern point of view. Energy is in fact the substance from which all elementary particles, all atoms and therefore all things are made, and energy is that which moves. Energy is a substance, since its total amount does not change, and the elementary particles can actually be made from this substance as is seen in many experiments on the creation of elementary particles. Energy can be changed into motion, into heat, into light and into tension. Energy may be called the fundamental cause for all change in the world.¹⁴⁶

And if Heraclitus’ view that ‘the changes wrought by and symbolized by fire govern the world’¹⁴⁷ is summed-up by his statement ‘Thunderbolt steers all things’¹⁴⁸ then agreement between his sense of ‘fire’ and energy may be even closer than it appears in Heisenberg’s account.

Seeming compatible with this reflection on Heraclitus, Bohm further elaborates on his identification of undivided wholeness as *Undivided Wholeness in Flowing Movement*: ‘This view implies that flow is, in some sense, prior to that of the ‘things’ that can be seen to form and dissolve in this flow’.¹⁴⁹

The proposal for a new general form of insight is that all matter is of this nature: That is, there is a universal flux that cannot be defined explicitly but which can be known only implicitly, as indicated by the explicitly definable forms and shapes, some stable and some unstable, that can be abstracted from the universal flux. In this flow, mind and matter are not separate substances. Rather, they are different aspects of one whole

145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 D. W. Graham, *Heraclitus*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy [Online]
148 Ibid.
149 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.14

and unbroken movement.¹⁵⁰

Having established this sense of Wholeness, Bohm suggests problems of differentiation within it may then be more easily addressed.¹⁵¹ Here he considers Aristotle’s notion of causality, which identified four kinds of causes: Material, Efficient, Formal and Final.¹⁵²

...in the case of a plant, the material cause is the soil, air, water and sunlight, constituting the substance of the plant. The efficient cause is some action, external to the thing under discussion, which allows the whole process to get underway. In the case of a tree, for example, the planting of the seed could be taken as the efficient cause’.¹⁵³

He then explains that what the Ancient Greeks would have understood by Formal cause is better described now as formative cause ‘to emphasize that what is involved is not a mere form imposed from without, but rather an ordered and structured inner movement that is essential to what things are.’¹⁵⁴ Formative causes are implicitly connected to a notion of a final cause (the resultant thing).¹⁵⁵ Final cause could be interpreted in some ways as “design”, ‘this notion being extended to God, who was regarded as having created the universe according to some grand design’,¹⁵⁶ but Bohm suggests that ‘design is, however, only a special case of final cause’, noting, among other things, the frequent discrepancy between any design and its final form.¹⁵⁷ Here then he especially discusses the notion of formative cause, as compatible and explaining of a sense of differentiation within wholeness:

Evidently, the notion of formative cause is relevant to the view of undivided wholeness in flowing movement, which has been seen to be implied in modern developments in physics, notably relativity theory and quantum theory. Thus, as has been pointed out, each relatively autonomous

150 Ibid.
151 Ibid., pp.14-15
152 Ibid., p.15
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid., p.16
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.

and stable structure (e.g. an atomic particle) is to be understood not as something independently and permanently existent but rather as a product that has been formed in the whole flowing movement and that will ultimately dissolve back into this movement. How it forms and maintains itself, then, depends on its place and function in the whole.¹⁵⁸

It is a particularly intentional aspect of this ‘implicit’ process of formative causation I wish to suggest, through this study, that artworks partake in.

Here I would note though what seems a significant difference between Bohm’s position and Heisenberg’s development of the relation of form and fundamental substance. As Heisenberg describes, ‘from our modern point of view we would say that the empty space between the atoms in the philosophy of Democritus was not nothing; it was the carrier for geometry and kinematics, making possible the various arrangements and movements of atoms’.¹⁵⁹ He further states that ‘in the theory of general relativity the answer is given that geometry is produced by matter or matter by geometry’.¹⁶⁰ Heisenberg progresses to a consideration of Plato’s thoughts on matter and geometry, where he notes that Plato was not an atomist, that he was in fact very strongly opposed to the teachings of Democritus (wishing his books to be burned), but still ‘combined ideas that were near to atomism with the doctrines of the Pythagorean school and the teachings of Empedocles’.¹⁶¹ ‘Here’, Heisenberg notes, ‘has been established the connection between religion and mathematics which ever since has exerted the strongest influence on human thought’.¹⁶² It was the Pythagoreans who realized ‘the creative force inherent in mathematical formulations’,¹⁶³ noting ratio and harmony in the world. Plato then combined the polygons we now call the Platonic Solids, forms which had been identified by the Pythagoreans, with the elements of Empedocles.¹⁶⁴ What is very significant here in Heisenberg’s discussion is that each polygon is composed of equilateral and isosceles triangles, but that these ‘fundamental triangles cannot be considered as matter, since they have no extension in space. It is only when the triangles are put together to form a regular solid that a unit of

158 Ibid., pp.17-18
159 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.31
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid., p.32
162 Ibid., pp.32-33
163 Ibid., p.33
164 Ibid.

matter is created.’¹⁶⁵ Thus, ‘the smallest parts of matter are not the fundamental Beings, as in the philosophy of Democritus, but are mathematical forms. Here it is quite evident that the form is more important than the substance of which it is the form.’¹⁶⁶ While he adds a caveat to his discussion, of the ‘enormous difference’ between modern science and Greek philosophy, in their methods (modern science’s ‘empiricist attitude’), and thus also in their conclusions,¹⁶⁷ he closely identifies modern physics as ‘against the materialism of Democritus and for Plato and the Pythagoreans’,¹⁶⁸ especially through consideration of what physics is able to say about the elementary particles: ‘the only thing which can be written down as description is a probability function’.¹⁶⁹ Thus he concludes ‘...the resemblance of the modern views to those of Plato and the Pythagoreans can be carried somewhat further. The elementary particles in Plato’s *Timaeus* are finally not substance but mathematical forms.’¹⁷⁰

The sense here of solely mathematical forms, forms with no extension in space, would appear to establish a separate order of being, and thus be opposed to the sense of forms within wholeness that Bohm describes. That is, it seems notable here that Heisenberg connects these comments with Plato, while Bohm more frequently refers to Aristotle.

For the various reasons given through this thesis, this study tends to be in agreement here with Bohm. Bohm’s sense of formative cause is applicable to entities such as atomic particles, which are not discussed as solely mathematical, and are implicitly part of a general process. Heisenberg’s alignment of mathematical forms with Plato and the Pythagoreans certainly appears to suggest their transcendence of this process, and indeed, in continuing his discussion, and extending this to the goal in science of a law of motion,¹⁷¹ he describes this as an ‘eternal law’ of which, ‘...the mathematical forms that represent the elementary particles will be solutions’.¹⁷²

165 Ibid., pp.33-34
166 Ibid., p.34
167 Ibid., p.38
168 Ibid., p.35
169 Ibid.
170 Ibid., p.36
171 W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.36
172 Ibid.

Consideration of HICA's programme and its concerns with a notion of a Concrete art, as I have aimed to describe, indicate a conclusion that through our habitual, instinctual responses to 'shape', we develop our 'fit' and relation with our environment: how a form maintains itself depends on its place and function in the whole process. 'Shape' may then be a differentiated thing within substance, but is a thing formed by the self-organising nature of substance, not a separate geometry. This sense, and the fact that it is consistently inferred from the works themselves, is of pivotal importance in these works' interpretation.

This relation of substance and geometry again states a conclusion of a physical monism as most likely, though I also note the general uncertainty, and the apparent radical difference in implication of these recent authoritative opinions, of Bohm and Heisenberg, as well as the very wide range of continuing research in these areas.¹⁷³ I reflect then that it seems something close to gainsay to assert any definitive view here. Again, the stating of a conclusion, such as this monism, appears only as a necessity in pursuing a development in the current discussion of the particular artworks.

5.5 Dual natures within overall unity

While the question of the exact nature of substance (and its implications, regarding our sense of an objective reality, for example) may thus, in some ways, remain absolutely open, the term 'quacrete' seeks to present its uncertain, but presumed overall unity, through what may appear to us as a 'structure of oppositions'; the term's two-part form signifying all instances of a dualistic nature brought together into a unity encountered through this study, as what perhaps to our classical sense can only seem paradoxical and contradictory. Here, for instance, the intention of works by Thomson and Craighead, to see beyond this dualistic 'handle' on the world, our particular horizon. That is, these perceived oppositions may be the result of our living through our classical understandings of the world, our interpretations of its unity. Quacrete thus suggests these oppositions here as our coordinates, necessary for our positioning within (an otherwise ungraspable) unity.

¹⁷³ Some of which is included by J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp.234-263

Quacrete, in relation to modern art history, may be further implied as a combining of the particular coordinates of Dada and Constructivist tendencies (as especially pertinently embodied in the work of van Doesburg): its 'quan-' may suggest a probabilistic nature: 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent' in Baudelaire's reckoning perhaps¹⁷⁴, and '-crete' stand as Baudelaire's 'eternal and immutable' (accepting, as variously commented, the suggestion here of these things as also ultimately contingent on the nature of the universe). '-crete' thus states the 'general' laws, formed through spatial character; the structure and order that shows through all that has been formed and exists as part of the present, and which, notably, comprises the 'classical' vocabulary of Constructivism.

Thus it further combines our classical sense of the 'actual', as Heisenberg discusses, and the New or 'modern' sense, of Heisenberg's 'possible': it may accept our inescapable classical understandings, but indicate an awareness that this is not all there is. And, furthermore, present these together as the possible overall unity itself; the continual development of the process of possible to actual. Here, in this way, the quacrete aligns with the moment of the 'quantum jump'; the collapse of the wavefunction during the act of observation,¹⁷⁵ the 'transition from the "possible" to the "actual"' which, according to Heisenberg 'takes place as soon as the interaction of the object with the measuring device, and thereby with the rest of the world, has come into play'.¹⁷⁶

At this point quantum theory is intrinsically connected with thermodynamics in so far as every act of observation is by its very nature an irreversible process; it is only through such irreversible processes that the formalism of quantum theory can be consistently connected with actual events in space and time.¹⁷⁷

The quacrete is thus a more particular statement of this continual concretization.

5.6 The nature of quacrete reconciliation

¹⁷⁴ as quoted in section 4.54

¹⁷⁵ W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, p.22

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.89-90

Developing from this sense of oppositions within a unity, the quacrete seeks to consider what may be a resolution or reconciliation of these states: how might we proceed in the face of the seemingly irreconcilable subject/object divisions as they are manifested in approaches to relevant artworks; the physiological or psychological orientation discussed in relation to Constructivist works, for example?¹⁷⁸ Here both these orientations may be suggested as 'classical', dualistic interpretations, the result of our, now implied as ultimately incorrect, oppositional sense of subjective separation.

The quacrete intends a shift away from these classical interpretations toward an awareness of the complex and 'whole' nature of the process itself (rather than a sense of an objective 'organic unity' as earlier discussed by Žižek¹⁷⁹): our ideas of art and objecthood may, for instance, be similarly implied as our 'classical' identifications where neither truly occurs in a pre-existent (eternal, immutable) state. Both are reliant instead on (the complex process of) our current perceptions to maintain their identification, which here aligns with the 'actual' process, or the process of actualizing (which is thus a concretization in this way). Our sense of art and objecthood, or the psychological and physiological may then be aligned, as with Bohm's 'dance of the mind', as our own interpretations, our 'maps', useful to us, not as 'explanation', but as our own acts of understanding; our 'thought and what is thought about', within, and in dialogue with, the 'totality of flux'.¹⁸⁰

Where our usual 'classical' distance prevents any truly lasting and satisfying sense of reconciliation, it may be judged the necessary result of our being as part of this whole process. Acceptance of this appears in tandem with a new awareness beyond our classical perceptions, affording glimpses of a state in which these oppositions need no longer apply, and suggesting a possible means of understanding and approaching other moments of impasse. This appears to be in common with the procedures adopted by artists such as Gillick in developing their work's relation to these same kinds of oppositional structures. Hence, it would seem, Gillick's concern to find the 'middle-ground';

The middle marks the difference between extremes – of opinion, degree

178 See again, for instance, A. Scharf's discussion in N. Stangos (Ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art*, pp.167-168

179 See section 5.42

180 See section 4.45

of organisation, value, and so on. It holds them apart, but also provides a bridge, offers the chance of a meeting of minds, a reconciliation or compromise.¹⁸¹

Liam Gillick, *Benched Discussion*, 2009

181 Michael Archer in S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen (Eds.), *Liam Gillick*, p.133. In the light of this sense of achieving balance it is interesting to note Bohm's discussion of Ancient Greek notions of measure, not, as with our modern sense, of a 'comparison of an object with an external standard or unit', (D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.25) but as a more general sense of harmony (Ibid., p.26); an attitude or judgment that would appear achieved through some sense of a (always complex) relational geometry: '... a grasp of measure was a key to the understanding of harmony in music (e.g., measure as rhythm, right proportion in intensity of sound, right proportion in tonality, etc.). Likewise, in the visual arts, right measure was seen as essential to overall harmony and beauty (e.g., consider the 'Golden Mean'). All of this indicates how far the notion of measure went beyond that of comparison with an external standard, to point to a universal sort of inner ratio or proportion, perceived both through the senses and through the mind' (Ibid., p.27). This 'middle-ground' strategy of Gillick's might then seem a further development of the trajectory I earlier observed through Minimalism (see section 3.22), of a shift from relational aspects being within three-dimensional works, as with a Greenbergian sculptural tradition, to being without; where, in Minimalism, the works themselves are desired to exhibit 'wholeness, singleness and indivisibility' (*Art and Objecthood*, C. Harrison & P. Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, p.823). Gillick's appears a developed awareness that the understanding of even these three-dimensional Minimalist 'wholes' is formed only within the relational space of their experiencing. Any attempt at achieving a sense of harmony then seems focussed within that relational space, through the application of some sort of, necessarily 'ethical', 'golden rule'.

Thus the apparent incompatibility of the avant-garde and the mainstream, as discussed in my Introduction, with reference to groups of artists, from the Constructivists to the YBAs,¹⁸² might see a shift in attitudes, in and towards those who are judged to constitute each strand; as all struggling via their individual coordination between such ‘classical’ identifications and oppositions as ‘real’ and ‘abstract’, ‘art’ and ‘object’, ‘subject’ and ‘object’ and so on; their own individual coordination through the maze of their ‘multi-level’ motivations and interpretations.

This struggle indicates the nature of our engagement with ‘the real’ through the complexities in the moment of the process itself; our perceptions of both the ‘real’ and of our distance from the real as again reliant on our classical interpretations to maintain them. This does not then suggest our conceptualising as being of sole or primary importance, but sees our sense of the conceptual and the material ‘grow together’; producing a continuing unity of form and content, with ourselves in some way as catalysts or agents of this concretizing unity.

Liam Gillick

(L) *Home Office London*, Marsham Street, London, 2002-2005

(R) *The Horizon Produced by a Factory once It Had Stopped Producing Views*, The Wright Restaurant, Guggenheim, New York, 2009

182 See section 0.14

Gillick certainly makes a case for a more complex position here, as part of an ongoing development of ideas from the discussions that formed Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*. He suggests that ‘a degree of complexity and confusion is necessary’ for an understanding of artists’ works over the last twenty or so years.¹⁸³ (By confusion here I would suggest his meaning as a confusion of these kinds of classical notions.) Thus, as again an example in response to Bishop, he says ‘...she misreads Hal Foster’s earlier critique of the work of certain contemporary artists by artificially separating these “amenity works” from the general art work that they do, as if they have made themselves available as interior-design consultants in addition to their normal work.’¹⁸⁴

And here I would wish to consider HICA’s position again in relation to this discussion: where HICA is, and how it is (though these factors often developed somewhat fortuitously), have been intended as exploring and embodying what we consider a ‘New’ and more complex ‘modern’ relation between Man and Nature, art and objecthood etcetera. We understand this as a development from views such as those of the New Tendencies and artists such as Haacke, whose thinking might be ‘...in terms of systems: the production of systems, the interference with and the exposure of existing systems... physical, biological, or social.’¹⁸⁵ Gillick’s making artworks as critical investigations appears a continuation of this approach; an intention for art that enables a stance perhaps paralleling¹⁸⁶ rather than being opposed to the mainstream, in order to develop means for consideration of that mainstream; of how aspects of culture have come to be as they are.¹⁸⁷

Thus here, Gillick’s concerns with the ‘semiotics of the built world’,¹⁸⁸ or Bourriaud’s with art as a process of non-verbal semiotization,¹⁸⁹ as a concern with the processes *forming* a culture. Those that are easiest enabled to see this, to adopt a critical stance, are perhaps those that sit least comfortably within the dominant culture. Gillick comments, for instance:

183 See Gillick’s footnote (10) in L. Gillick, (2006) *Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop’s “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics”*, p.99

184 Ibid., p.100

185 L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, p.xiii

186 As in Archer’s comments again, S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen, (Eds.) *Liam Gillick*, pp.132-133

187 See Gaensheimer’s comments again also here: Ibid., p.8

188 See the exhibition’s press release; Appendix A

189 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.88

...the artists of Cuban, Algerian, Irish, and Thai heritage under consideration in Bourriaud's books... [are] a group whose complex and divided family histories have taught them to become sceptical shape-shifters in relation to the dominant culture in order to retain, rather than merely represent, the notion of a critical position.¹⁹⁰

Bourriaud has also reflected here on misreadings of his *Relational Aesthetics*, that stress the ethical intentions and deliberations of the artists and artworks:

This misunderstanding is all the more striking as the book's thematic focus is the new status of form (new 'formations', in order to emphasise the dynamic character of the elements in question, whose area of definition embraces both bodily dispositions and temporality, to which the forms must cohere). In short the ethical dimensions of works by Rirkrit Tiravanija or Liam Gillick is not the one that counts, but rather their ability, proceeding from the interpersonal sphere, to invent methods for exhibition and reflection. In this way, Gillick defines his entire oeuvre to date as "a space for the negotiation of ideas in which individuals actually control the nature of the world in which they operate".¹⁹¹

Accordingly, the role of the viewer or audience in the 'activity' of the artwork is made central, consistent with the role of the observer in modern physics: Gillick states, '...my work is like the light in the fridge, it only works when there are people there to open the fridge door. Without people, it's not art – it's something else – stuff in a room.'¹⁹²

(Here it seems necessary to clarify my argument in relation to questions around the connections between the formal and the ethical. In common with Bourriaud's remarks above, this thesis and the sense of Concrete artworks I have sought to explore through HICA, approach the formal and ethical primarily from the perspective of 'form', developing a proposal of our individual aesthetic involvements as our part in the processes of formation of the world. (I would note

190 L. Gillick, (2006) *Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"*, p.106

191 *Liam Gillick: One Long Walk... Two Short Piers...*, p.18

192 *Ibid.*, p.17

again the formal as something non-mechanistic. As with Gillick's quote above, it appears to require cognitive involvement of some order to enable its process, its ethical and Relational aspects.) Though perhaps differing here from Bourriaud, or where perhaps he overstates his case, the ethical is not then dismissed, but seen as one dimension of these formal concerns; one way they may be encountered or interpreted. This I suggest is compatible with a unified view of what appears to our Classical understandings a structure of oppositions, and, I argue, is consistent with, for one example, Spinoza's developing of his Ethics through geometric concerns: 'I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies'.¹⁹³ Here ethics may be judged a necessary cultural manifestation of what are ultimately physical constraints, developing such relational geometry as I note on page 359. They result from the world's immanent nature. They are neither transcendent morals nor solely human constructs. A question may then be their primacy in terms of interpreting artworks, where it may be more helpful and correct to see the ethical as unfolding from the formal: ultimately formed through form, rather than determining form, although I would state again my proposal of a process at least of feedback here through our own actions and aesthetic response. While I feel it is broadly correct therefore to consider an artwork's formal worth before its ethical worth, if this judgement is required, a sense I understand as in some sympathy with Bourriaud and Gillick here, I also suggest this all presents an alternative way of seeing the thinking of both the ethical and aesthetic together that Claire Bishop has called for.¹⁹⁴ not as a contradiction, but as necessarily related aspects within a unity.

I would, however, note a potentially significant difference between this argument and what seems emphasised by Gillick's approach. By his equating the abstract with the utopian, as an ideal which can never satisfyingly be achieved, a separation may too easily appear between more formal identifications within the here and now and ethical concerns which become an impulse toward the utopian and ideal. While this thesis is in agreement with a process necessarily manifesting as some inevitable drive for progress (or at least, change), for those who form part of it, HICA's concerns have again been to consider the processes of formation acting within the moment itself, which, as elsewhere stated, may instead suggest any 'relational backdrop' to be, not abstract, but concrete; as real affects; as variously

193 B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.69

194 See section 0.14

explored and considered, something more closely related to an Hegelian Ideal, in which the formal and ethical are again necessary dimensions of 'what is'.)

Artists such as van Doesburg were, at the time (nearly a century ago) working to enable a re-alignment to modern physics (though its basic formulating was on-going through his lifetime). Augusto de Campos and the Noigandres poets are further examples of those working in 'concrete' modes who made this connection explicit, making modern physics part of the essential basis for their works' understanding.¹⁹⁵ I thus do not intend this study as a first identification of this alignment, or suggest that artists working currently are not well aware of these ideas and their heritage (those, for instance, working in Relational modes or those variously employing technology, and concepts from science). An idea, such as my proposal here of the 'quancrete', may in this way state what was known previously, but then also state what has always been known, or experienced, as exemplified by Heisenberg's discussion of parallels between modern and ancient science and philosophies. This study (and hence the quancrete) intends more a clarification; its argument suggests that, given this history and recent art-history (the periods of High and Post- modern especially) this alignment, of modern art to modern physics and the consideration of its implications, appears now, through modes of practice such as the Relational, and renewed wider concerns with materiality, to be more readily and generally applicable and understandable, and identifiable as the continuing and originating spirit of the modern, that, I propose, may also be aligned with a consistent 'concrete' concern and development. This highlights the debatable nature of comments by Krauss, for instance,¹⁹⁶ suggesting that 'we are standing now [in 1981] on the threshold of a postmodernist art, an art of a fully problematized view of representation...'. In considering what might be a 'proto-history' of this postmodernism Krauss further states that we can 'only now recognize [this] as the contemporaneous alternative to modernism.'¹⁹⁷ I intend this study to indicate this 'contemporaneous alternative' as the modern itself. The confusions and misidentifications surrounding it, and forming such dynamics as the High to Post- modern, only serving to draw attention away from its developing inquiry into the material.

195 See my discussion in the previous chapter, section 4.54

196 Made in *In the Name of Picasso*, in R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, p.38

197 Ibid., p.39

5.7 Becoming actuality

'All Thought emits a Throw of the Dice'¹⁹⁸

Uncertainty in the moment of change from the possible to the actual I suggest as a quancrete experience: negotiating the perhaps infinite, fractal-like complexity in making choices and decisions (my earlier analogy of the paths of lightning and the agency of forms, as symbiotic processes: section 2.87). This is then our negotiating and navigating of the world through our perceptions and responses to forms. An aligning of this experience with understandings from modern physics states an inherent unpredictability, due to the nature of the behaviours of the elements involved, and the process's immense complexity. It indicates the deep significance in our individual experience, and our interventions into this process, as active elements in our own right; our 'hunger of form';¹⁹⁹ a constituent in the moving forward through uncertainty which is negotiated by everything, in each existent moment.

I have considered in this study that our inputs into this process are primarily the result of our aesthetic judgements, our dealing compositionally and relationally with the world, deciding where and how we position ourselves, our 'formal' considerations, in all situations in our lives. In this way I would, especially in response to the questions reflected on through Liam Gillick's project at HICA, highlight the great complexity of any 'relational backdrop' to artworks, while stating this complexity as a concrete rather than 'abstract' process.

Here the knowledge of the processes of actualization that recent physics provides suggests our broader cultural realization of our integration; the impossibility of objective observation states our unity with that which we observe, and thus, with the world. In this way, if analogies to these quantum processes are viable, we may be suggested to be going through some process of cultural decoherence, away from our 'isolated abstract religious culture' as van Doesburg comments, to our more conscious incorporation into the physical universe.

198 The last line of Mallarmé's *Un Coup De Dés*, 1897

199 Again see section 2.87, and also 3.37

It seems possible that increasing recognition of this incorporation also increases our mindfulness, our sense of responsibility, in relation to our own actions; our awareness of our part in forming the actual: where physics may inform us of the vastness of the universe, in which we may feel our actions are meaningless and insignificant, truly a miniscule drop in an immense ocean, this same physics alerts us to the significance in each drop in the ocean: Al-Khalili states ‘there are more atoms in a single glass of water than there are glasses of water needed to fill all the seas and oceans of the world’,²⁰⁰ or as Schrödinger describes an equivalent example given by Lord Kelvin;

suppose that you could mark the molecules in a glass of water; then pour the contents of the glass into the ocean and stir the latter thoroughly so as to distribute the marked molecules uniformly throughout the seven seas; if then you took a glass of water anywhere out of the ocean, you would find in it about a hundred of your marked molecules.²⁰¹

Al-Khalili puts these quite astounding examples into even more dramatic perspective by considering what the tiniest, indivisible, unit of space (a quantum of volume) may be projected to be: he states, in relation to the size of atoms, as above; ‘...you could pack a thousand billion atomic nuclei within the space of a single atom...’ and, ‘an atomic nucleus can accommodate as many quantum volumes as there are cubic metres in the Milky Way Galaxy (roughly 10^{62} m^3).’²⁰²

To illustrate what might then be the extent of the fundamental nature of energy, I would note Bohm’s consideration of the energy indicated by such units of space, where he suggests ‘that what we call empty space contains an immense background of energy, and that matter as we know it is a small, ‘quantized’ wavelike excitation on top of this background, rather like a tiny ripple on a vast sea.’ ... ‘If one computes the amount of energy that would be in one cubic centimetre of space... it turns out to be very far beyond the total energy of all the matter in the known universe’.²⁰³

The truly incomprehensible results of these predictions properly illustrate then

the possible extent of the distance of our day-to-day and ‘classical’ experiences from the ‘real’ nature of the material, as well as the real complexity involved in our human-scale operations, reflecting the potential significance in, say, Barry’s inert gas series; *From a Measured Volume to an Indefinite Expansion*, as an equivalent to the example of the atoms in a glass of water; the scale of the effects we create through every moment of every day.

Our aesthetic negotiation of forms thus provides a concrete content as an involvement in a fundamental but evolving order, a correspondence between ‘shape’ and whatever the physical, quantum-scale, ‘truth’ may be; an involvement, it would seem implied, as real as anything and everything else. Our involvements here with and as part of form, thus provide a framework in which objective laws seem apparent, not as principles set down prior to existence, but realised as part of, and as part of the forming of, an overall unity: a point in which we bring to bear our experience of all past moments of forming, and thus in which our habit and instinct also aid our projections ahead, in trying to judge and guide outcomes. Here our ‘knowledge’ as our dynamic involvement in the development of this process, and understanding from all forms of reason (our human reason, our discerning of classical law from this experience, or of apparent ordering principles in nature, such as ‘might is right’) would, alongside the extent of natural possibilities, provide concrete principles by which we enact our part in the world’s self-organisation. This more fluid sense of universal order, and its focus on the process itself, incorporates the subjective and particular as necessary elements in the active creation of new forms. Artworks, such as those I have described in this thesis, that operate to suggest or project a further position from a given state of things, may be seen as particularly focused efforts to aid or inform the move from possible to actual; a strategy, which appropriately employs plastic means, to predict and perhaps influence the future form of the world.

This process may suggest a shift in perceptions of time, toward seeing time as a sedimentation of possible into actual; something closer to a continually evolving ‘now’, than a (deterministic) progression through past, present and future. By this, any inquiry into ‘the real’ may never lead to a radical breakthrough, utopian state, or marked change to our living, yet remain a necessary development through an evolving set of possibilities. While this does not share Gillick’s apparent focus on the utopian, as the unachievable ‘abstract’, driving this development, it otherwise,

200 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.197

201 E. Schrödinger, *What is Life?*, pp.6-7

202 J. Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.197

203 D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.242

I propose, equates to his procedures in consideration of our urge to construction of the present.²⁰⁴ It further presents the sense of progress proposed by a quancrete art: considering our efforts towards an understanding of ‘the real’ as perhaps inevitable, but accepting the likely permanent distance from any consciously applicable knowledge of how this, essentially, operates.

204 For instance, see Susanne Gaensheimer’s text, *Consultation Filter* in S. Gaensheimer & N. Schafhausen (Eds.), *Liam Gillick*, p.8

6 A provisional presentation of conclusions

The focus of HICA’s programmes, since the gallery’s opening in 2008, has been on the problems encountered in any consideration of artworks as ‘concrete’. HICA has therefore also investigated the history and usage of the term Concrete Art. This inquiry has been directed through the devising of annual programs of exhibitions, a curatorial methodology that has been extended and developed to form the more pointed investigation of this practice-led study. The more specific focus and inquiry this period of research has allowed, has resulted in a more purposeful consideration of these concerns overall, and enabled a more complete and structured formulation of, what remain provisional, conclusions:

Questioning the designations of rational and intuitive knowledge, which appear commonly taken as the basis to (generally opposed) understandings of the ‘concrete’ in art, I have considered these as masking a more subtle process reliant on degrees of reasoning, developed from our constant practical and ‘instinctive’ involvement in the world.

‘Chance’ which may have presented a problem, for the rational, or have suggested a surrendering to the intuitive, may here be judged instead as a result of the complexities of Nature, producing effects which may appear to us, at our scale, as ‘random’ or ‘irrational’.

This realignment amounts to a shift from transcendent to immanent explanation; an immanence which permits notions of universals through consideration of the physical nature of space (particular at all points), and the self-organising of matter: the uniting of the universal with the particular that this self-organisation enables explains how a concrete and ‘particular’ art may also be essentially reliant on the universal.

As we are equally part of this physical nature, our practical and more or less reasoned involvements are then proposed as a mechanism providing both necessarily subjective interpretations of the world and a basic orientation derived from our immersion in the objective world. These two resulting spheres of understanding develop an inevitable paradox: a dualistic result from what seems most likely an overall material unity. (Consistent with modern physics’

statements about the nature of the physical world and our relation to it, this study discounts a mechanistic materialism, accepting instead a complex and indeterminate nature, revealed at scales beyond our 'classical' understanding. Noting an area of agreement between this same physics and philosophies such as that of Heraclitus, it further considers the process and transformation of the material as significant in the consideration of the nature of substance itself. Here, 'thought', and thus our subjective responses, are aligned as also material, and judged (along with whatever other forms of consciousness may be found to exist in Nature) to form some necessary part within this material process.)

The observation then of a structure of paradoxical positions, or oppositions, appears correct at our scale of understanding; something that coordinates our experience of the world, and which may be observed in artworks as the basis of relational interpretation; providing an 'empirical geometry', either within or external to the work; the foundations of representation, from which further meanings may be developed.

Apparent representational distance from more concrete states I have judged to be not the problem it may seem: representation appears equivalent to our subjectivity in being a function of the wider concrete processes we are necessarily involved within.

The perceiving of forms and materials as 'presentation' remains vitally important in developing awareness of plastic meaning, of the unity of form and content, consistent with and revealing of our being part of what may be objective and universal, and thus indicative also of the 'active', and not inert nature of the forms and materials that constitute the world. Though highlighting our subjectivity and representational involvements foregrounds our aesthetic responses to these forms and materials. It is this aesthetic negotiation, at our scale of understanding, that is proposed as our significant individual active involvement in pervasive processes of formation; perhaps the mechanism by which these processes function.

While the presence of a structure of oppositions appears confirmed, the equal awareness of its paradoxical basis prompts consideration of that from which the structure is developed. Here, the knowledge that this structure is (at least in part) an inevitably human interpretation requires a questioning of the structure's

manifestation. Art appears a means to investigate the functioning of this structure and its possible adaptation, as well as an inquiry beyond it, for insight that may then inform supposedly given human values: it may infer beyond the actual, to consider the possible, where its projections may offer means for resolution of otherwise intractable binary oppositions. In this procedure, and in the proposed general development of the world through a process of aesthetic response and judgement, this study sees agreement with the basic modernist assertion, of art's involvement in directing the development of the actual.

A shift may be perceived here, engendered through a new sense of concrete involvement: to reference Bohm's observations; away from seeking an 'explanation' of the 'rational' limits of everything (a science, seeking certainty in this way may be judged incompatible with the nature of art: it would attempt to stand outside and measure that which cannot be stood outside of), and toward involved 'acts of understanding'; finding ways to develop understandings through more 'human-scale' and immanent connections: recognising the significance in our aesthetic responses to, and interactions with what we perceive as form, and the processes of its constant transformation.

(Prior attempts at forming a science of art-making, such as the examples of van Doesburg or elements within the New Tendencies, may be implied here as based on hangovers from classical understandings, suggesting the possibility of the 'rational' engagement of artistic concerns. Our responses to form are instead here suggested to be reliant on much subtler mechanisms, perhaps inherently uncertain and unpredictable. Whether future means, utilizing modern science, may one day be developed to form something like a science of art-making (considering the dramatic developments it has enabled elsewhere) perhaps remains a moot point.)

By this formulation, artworks may be judged as 'concrete' through a conclusion of a physicalist sense that everything essentially is, and more pointedly here, through their intention to direct involvement in 'what is'. They may accordingly, and more intentionally, engage and develop understandings by means of what, at least at root, are plastic meanings (a unity of form and content, judged here as consistent with a physical monism), necessarily involved in current meanings; the current state of the world.

This formulation then, I present as negotiating the diverse understandings of the 'concrete' in recent art history. I further intend it to highlight the on-going development of these understandings through the modern period, particularly through formulations such as van Doesburg's Art Concret. It proposes the dynamic between the High- and Post- modern as a less central concern, and instead reflects a consistent development via such routes as Concrete, Constructivist, Dada and Conceptual traditions, and thus explores how contemporary works, such as those included in our programmes at HICA, may be understood as related to this development, and these traditions.

A specific proposal, developed from this study as a whole, is then of a new term; the 'quancrete', which aims at better identifying this development and encapsulating its negotiation of the various problems the study has addressed: i.e. it highlights its 'new' rather than 'classical' basis; its dynamic and non-deterministic materiality; its consideration of Nature as an immanent and self-organising process, and so on.

The 'quancrete' is then intended to be useful in describing artistic intentions, where currently there appear no equivalent terms, and where reliance on terms with opposite implications (such as the 'immaterial') may be problematic.

The quancrete thus provides a consistent, wholly 'concrete' understanding of artworks, appropriate to the current context of renewed artistic interest in materiality, such as with Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, aiming to widen its discussion of materiality and offer a more comprehensive view of these concerns; a context which indicates opportunities for the term and its intended implications' more ready application and general understanding.

Appendix A

The following pages contain the press releases for all HICA exhibitions considered through this study, arranged chronologically, from 2008 – 2013.

I have not included the contact details from these texts, for reasons of space, and the repetition of this information.

| | |
|--|-----|
| Concrete Now! | 376 |
| Peter Suchin | 377 |
| Richard Couzins | 378 |
| Alec Finlay, Alexander and Susan Maris | 379 |
| David Bellingham | 380 |
| Concrete Now! Introducing PS | 381 |
| HICA, as arranged | 382 |
| Jeremy Millar | 382 |
| Thomson and Craighead | 384 |
| Esther Polak and Ivar van Bekkum | 385 |
| The Great Glen Artists’ Airshow, in collaboration with The Arts Catalyst | 386 |
| Boyle Family | 388 |
| Richard Roth | 389 |
| Grow Together: Concrete Poetry in Brazil and Scotland | 390 |
| Concretely Immaterial | 391 |
| Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen | 392 |
| Doug Fishbone | 393 |
| Eloi Puig | 394 |
| Daniel Spoerri | 395 |
| Camila Sposati | 396 |
| Liam Gillick | 397 |

Highland art space opens with *Concrete Now!* exhibition.

Concrete Now!

24 August - 28 September 2008

HICA, a new art-space located approximately 12 miles south of Inverness, will open on the 24th August 2008 with *Concrete Now!* an exhibition of work by David Bellingham, Richard Couzins, Alec Finlay, Peter Suchin and Chris Totic.

The gallery occupies part of a house, attached to a working farm, which looks out over the impressive scenery around Loch Ruthven in the Scottish Highlands. The exceptional setting of this non-commercial space creates a very particular context for contemplating the work on show. The contrast between the dramatic landscape and the small 'white-cube' gallery highlights the relations between artist, viewer and the wider world, between human-scale activity and 'the bigger picture'.

An artist-run project, HICA will be specifically concerned with exploring the history and current influence of Concrete Art, a movement that began with the production of geometric paintings and sculpture in the early 20th Century.

This inquiry, combined with the gallery's location, enable the space to work as an experimental laboratory, providing means of understanding any artwork placed within it.

The works of the five artists in this exhibition explore the variety of ways that a concrete approach has developed from its origins. By the middle of the last century a great many artists, working within a wide variety of groups and movements had further expanded on Concrete Art's understanding of form and content, meaning and representation, and found new ways to explore its ideas through a variety of art-forms, including Concrete Poetry and Concrete Music.

HICA, throughout its exhibition programme, will be considering the increased, but more dispersed influence the term 'Concrete' has had since this time, a period where it seems very widely applicable, but perhaps strangely under-used.

The *Concrete Now!* exhibition will be open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment, and runs from 24th August till 28th September.

The Grey Planets

Peter Suchin exhibition at HICA

26 October – 30 November

The Highland Institute for Contemporary Art is pleased to present *The Grey Planets*, Peter Suchin's first solo exhibition in Scotland.

Suchin (b. 1959) is known for his frequently polemical contributions to art and theory journals such as Art Monthly, Frieze and Mute. His practice as a painter has, however, been somewhat more sparingly displayed. Borrowing its title from a large, as yet unexhibited painting, the present show brings together a number of Suchin's small, densely layered paintings, each the result of an extensive process of revision and redefinition.

Just as he has, in his capacity as an art critic, analysed the linguistic and institutional frameworks of art, Suchin has addressed in his paintings the sensuous, as it were implicit contingencies of the medium itself. These works can be read as "commentaries" upon the practice of painting, as well as coherent entities in their own right. The philosopher Paul Crowther has observed that "Suchin's paintings declare their sources - conscious or unconscious - quite manifestly... [his] "imagery" locates us in [an] ambiguous zone, where elements and relations hover before constellating into definitive figurative presence. He arrests the visible in the very act of its emergence." (*Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism*, Oxford University Press, 1993, p.204).

Suchin most recently contributed to the exhibitions *4x4* (Sartorial Gallery, London, 2008), *Penned* (Baltimore Museums and USA tour, 2008), and *Concrete Now!* (HICA, Loch Ruthven, Scotland, 2008). His works are held in many private collections in Britain, Europe and the USA.

The Grey Planets is supported by the National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council.

The exhibition runs from 26th October till 30th November 2008, and will be open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

*Free Speech Bubble***Richard Couzins exhibition at HICA****1 March-5 April 2009**

The video installation *Free Speech Bubble* by Richard Couzins, will open at the HICA art-space on Sunday 1st March.

Couzins, who has exhibited widely both as a solo artist and as a member of the Otolith Group, explores in his work the blurred lines between senses: examining perceptions through our bodily faculties as well as communications through language, with particular focus on the spoken word and the sound of the voice.

In *Free Speech Bubble* speech is freed from its moorings into an expanded cinema. Large posters to be placed in an Inverness shop front are duplicated on the outside wall of HICA (on a remote upland sheep farm). The posters have atavistic associations with culture as declaration, display and writing. The poster is linked to actions performed in a projection in the white cube space, and to a smaller screen (with headphones) in the picture window of an adjoining room overlooking the landscape.

Outside the picture window are the remains of a raised treadmill used to grind grain. The work evokes this as a metaphor - "utterances and speech genres, are the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language" (M.M.Bakhtin).

The treadmill's cycle is re-imagined as a catalyst, sparking new utterances and actions performed in the projected image.

Couzins says, "The show is a progression in my work with the noise and workings of the voice performed in video. An animated relationship is developed between visual plenty and the parsimony of language connecting body, landscape, poster and screens."

He has most recently contributed to the exhibitions:

You Have Not Been Honest (MADRE Naples) The Moscow Biennale (Moscow) *Artist's Cinema*, Frieze Art Fair (London) Exchange (Bankley Gallery, Manchester) Tate Triennale (Tate Britain)

Free Speech Bubble is supported by the National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council.

The exhibition runs from 1st March to 5th April 2009, and will be open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

*You'll have had your tea?***Alec Finlay****Alexander and Susan Maris**

3 May – 7 June 2009

The HICA art-space is to host *You'll have had your tea?* an exhibition by Alec Finlay and Alexander and Susan Maris, opening on the 3rd of May 2009. In appropriately ruminative works the artists employ various food items and the familiar beverage to reflect on the nature of the particular and the generation of poetic meaning.

Alec Finlay continues his commitment to the poem-object, presenting an anthology of simple forms: the outlines of islands and lakes realised as biscuit cutter patterns, baked as biscuits; mesostic poems composed on the names of fruits used to make jam and jelly; and a piece, bread, baked with an imprinted poem.

The exhibition will also feature the first showing of Finlay's *tea-moon*, with 16 tea-prints selected from a substantial new body of work. These gently stochastic spills of different tea brews are each imprinted with a cup mark or 'moon' and their own unique handwritten mesostic. Resonant of John Cage's smoke prints, this serial project bears out Finlay's continued unfurling of the traditions of haiku and renga into the present day.

A newly published collection of some of these poems published by *Painted, Spoken* will be available from the gallery. Alec will also give a short reading at the opening.

Alexander and Susan Maris have collected 900 ml of water from each of the 21 named rivers on Rannoch Moor and using heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) gathered from the surrounding moor they have prepared and consumed a series of 21 kettles of heather tea. Each kettle has been used just once and is engraved with the name of the corresponding river. The scorch marks on the base of the kettles add to the uniqueness of each multiple in the edition. As a documentary record, each kettle has also been filmed coming to the boil. Consequently, the duration of each video varies according to the prevailing weather conditions at each location.

Extrapolating from the Marises' theory that the gelatine 'offering' made by Joseph Beuys to Rannoch Moor in 1970, has metabolically transformed the Moor - its energy transmigrating through generations of trout - the heather and water on Rannoch Moor must also contain a homeopathic dose of Beuysian Gelatine. And though the nature and efficacy of this remedy are as yet unclear, it has been proven that heather tea does in fact detoxify the body and alleviate depression. The piece also raises the question - were the artists still 'at work' when they paused to drink their therapeutic brew?

You'll have had your tea? is supported by the National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council.

The exhibition runs from 3rd May – 7th June 2009, and will be open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

40w 60w 100w**David Bellingham**

28 June – 2 August 2009

40w 60w 100w an exhibition by David Bellingham, will open at the HICA art-space on 28th June 2009.

Bellingham's artworks question the randomness of our associations with form and material; are connections arbitrary, do they reveal structures of meaning?

In these recent works scenarios are devised to reveal his daily, constant, involvement with these questions. Reflecting an approach analogous to a desert-island castaway, materials immediately to-hand are employed in order to consider what might be the bigger picture: measurements, a pre-occupying concern in Bellingham's work, here take the form of counted days, his morning coffee becomes a routine of isolation, though, along with some of the local fruits, all are scrutinized with a wit that makes them something more exotic.

"The sun comes and goes; the light of the day fluctuates in intensity. Fruits form and slowly ripen, some bitter others sweet.", the artist describing *40w, 60w, 100w*.

The works then function to probe the gap between objective record and subjective experience. Their apparent arbitrary starting-points suggest that one could begin an inquiry from anywhere and be consequently lead to consider what might be a natural order.

"The resulting images, like all images, are the residue of a process." Bellingham discussing *Powder Paint Espresso*.

In this context an easy combination of hand-written text and fruit illuminates something of our conceptual processes and prompts reflections on the nature of our being-in-the-world.

40w 60w 100w has been supported by the National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council.

The exhibition runs from 28th June - 2nd August 2009, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Concrete Now! Introducing PS**23 August – 27 September 2009**

HICA, The Highland Institute for Contemporary Art, is to host an exhibition of artists' work from PS gallery, Amsterdam, opening on Sunday 23rd August, 2009.

Concrete Now! Introducing PS will present work from artists who have exhibited with PS, including Julian Dashper, Michelle Grabner, Gerold Miller, John Nixon, Jan van der Ploeg, and Tilman. A truly international show, bringing together artists from Europe, USA, Australia and New Zealand it will also stand as the second of a series of annual group exhibitions held by the HICA art-space which seek each year to extend the discussion around the space and its concerns with ideas of 'concrete' as opposed to 'abstract' artworks.

Based in Melbourne, Australia, John Nixon is one on the country's leading minimalist practitioners with works in collections worldwide, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. "The materiality of my work is part of the materiality of experience. I work from the premise that the work of art exists in a 'real', physical, rather than illusory world." - John Nixon, from *Thesis: Selected Works from 1968-1993*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1994

Julian Dashper was born in Auckland, New Zealand in 1960. As well as being held in all the major public collections in New Zealand his work can also be found at MCA in Sydney, the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. He has recently been the subject of a major touring retrospective in America.

Tilman lives and works in Brussels and New York. As well as his own international art practice he is Artistic Director and Chief Curator of CCNOA, Centre for Contemporary Non-Objective Art, Brussels.

Michelle Grabner is a Professor in the Painting and Drawing Department at The Art Institute of Chicago, and co-founder of The Suburban, an artist project space in Illinois. "Painting is not Painting when it props up the self or attempts to tell stories. That activity is called picture making. Painting is larger than pictures but not larger than its limitations which are severe and singular and sweet." – Michelle Grabner

Gerold Miller lives and works in Berlin. He has held solo exhibitions in London, Paris, Vienna, Brisbane, Berlin, Zürich, Salzburg and Japan. "Miller's wall floor, and room objects in public and private space are space-scape pictures in the best sense, because they dare to grasp for the whole – of the world, of space, of the truth, and of the chaos, ramified like rhizomes – that we call life." Stephan Maier in: *Gerold Miller, Reforming the Future*, Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg 2001.

Jan van der Ploeg is co-founder of PS gallery in Amsterdam. His "grip" paintings first showed up on the streets of Amsterdam in 1996 and he has worked extensively and internationally with galleries such as Florence Lynch New York, Raid Projects Los Angeles, the Stedelijk Amsterdam, CCSC Barcelona and South London Gallery.

Both HICA and PS are artist-run galleries with a concern for developing international dialogue while also facilitating local discussion. While the exhibition space of PS is situated in a canal house in the centre of Amsterdam, HICA occupies what might in contrast seem a remote space in the Highlands of Scotland. *Concrete Now! Introducing PS* will be an opportunity to demonstrate a shared positive approach to exhibiting contemporary artworks, where the presenting of works and considering of ideas becomes a moment for examining existing understandings and a testing-ground; suggesting and offering new possibilities.

H – I – C – A

PRESS RELEASE

HICA, as arranged

17 January - 28 February 2010

HICA, as arranged, a group exhibition curated by the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art, will be opening at PS gallery, Amsterdam, on Sunday 17th Jan 2010.

Including works by David Bellingham, Richard Couzins, Thomson + Craighead, Alec Finlay, Geoff Lucas, Alexander and Susan Maris and Peter Suchin, this will be the second part of a curatorial exchange with PS, the first of which saw HICA host works from six international artists who have shown regularly with PS in the exhibition, *Concrete Now! Introducing PS*, and which took place last August at the HICA gallery.

HICA, as arranged has been supported by the British Council, and will run until 28 February.

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H – I – C – A

PRESS RELEASE

Jeremy Millar

2 May – 6 June 2010

HICA, The Highland Institute for Contemporary Art, is to host an exhibition of Jeremy Millar’s work, opening on Sunday 2nd May 2010.

Millar is currently AHRC Research Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, University of Oxford. He has exhibited widely in the UK and abroad including Tramway, Glasgow; CCA, Vilnius; Rooseum, Malmö; Bloomberg Space, London. Recent exhibitions include Vigeland Museum in Oslo; and Tate Modern, London.

This exhibition, including two new works, considers a sense of emergence, or unforeseen development, which is central to the creative process, no matter how pre-planned the work in question. Preparation is in many ways the subject of one new work, an artist’s film made with the acclaimed pianist John Tilbury ‘preparing’ the Steinway at his home, in the manner called for by John Cage for his *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946–8). In this preparation, metal screws, bolts, washers, pieces of plastic, and even an eraser, are placed between the strings of the piano, thereby altering the sound of the instrument to something often more akin to a Balinese gamelan. What remains extraordinary, however, is that such a transformation is made using the most modest of means — Tilbury’s collection of screws and bolts look as if grabbed from any

shed worktop — and as such might be considered a succinct analogy for the artistic process more generally.

Neutral (Diluted) (2007), an earlier series of works similarly using simplicity to refer to complexity, is inspired by two important books: François Jullien’s *In Praise of Blandness* and Roland Barthes’ *The Neutral*. Jullien, a prestigious sinologist, presents the Chinese notion of blandness (dan) as markedly different from its perception in the West; whereas we might consider it as a lack of defining qualities, within Chinese aesthetics it is considered the balanced and unnameable union of all possible values; as richness. Roland Barthes’ book consists of a series of lectures given at the Collège de France in 1978 in which he considers possible embodiments of the Neutral (such as sleep, or silence) or of the anti-Neutral (such as anger, or arrogance). Of particular inspiration for Barthes, was a bottle of ink he bought from the Sennelier shop, and which he spilled upon his return home; the colour was ‘Neutral’. Millar also bought some bottles of this ink from the Sennelier shop, (coincidentally on the same date as Barthes — 9 March) with which he made these works. These drawings attempt to represent such a notion of the Neutral, or of blandness, which in Chinese aesthetics is considered the undifferentiated foundation of reality, ‘the point of origin of all things possible’. The dilution of the ink, in turn, might be considered an attempt to limit, albeit partially, the seemingly-endless possibilities such a state might offer, a first point of engagement with such infinitude.

The final work also draws Millar’s interest in Chinese aesthetics, and in the occult practice of scrying, by which spiritual visions, of the past, present, or future, are observed in a medium; whether stones such as obsidian, water, or ink, an activity that has been noted in almost all cultures. In this new work, a small Chinese ‘Hare’s Fur’ bowl from the Song dynasty (960–1279) is placed before the large window of the gallery, looking out onto the landscape beyond; into this is placed a freshly ground solution of Chinese ink, thereby creating a black reflective surface such as might be used for observing psychic visions. Here, and elsewhere in the exhibition, Millar’s work is a simple invitation for us to consider that which lies beyond the most immediately apparent.

Forthcoming solo exhibitions include CCA, Glasgow (August 2010). Millar has also conceived ‘Every Day is a Good Day’ for Hayward Touring, the largest exhibition to date of the visual art of John Cage, which will open at Baltic in June 2010. He has published over eighty texts in a number of international publications. His books include *Place* (with Tacita Dean, Thames and Hudson, 2005) and *The Way Things Go* (Afterall Books, 2007). He has contributed to many artists’ publications, and to magazines and journals such as Art Monthly, frieze, Modern Painters, Parkett. A monograph on Millar’s work, *Zugzwang (almost complete)*, was published in 2006.

The exhibition has been supported by the Henry Moore Foundation and the Scottish Arts Council.

It runs from 2 May - 6 June 2010, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Thomson + Craighead**20 June – 25 July 2010**

An exhibition including new work by London and Kingussie based artists Thomson + Craighead will open at HICA on 20 June, 2-5pm.

Jon Thomson lectures at The Slade School of Fine Art, Alison Craighead is a Reader at University of Westminster and lectures in Fine Art at Goldsmiths University.

The exhibition will include new time-related pieces: a major new film work, *The Time Machine in Alphabetical Order*, is a complete rendition of the 1960's film version of HG Wells novella *Time Machine*, re-edited by the artists in its entirety into alphabetical order. This re-working imposes a formalistic time travel on the original movie and presents it back as a more esoteric and rhythmic narrative assemblage.

Flipped Clock is a modified digital clock display, where each individual digit is rotated by 180 degrees. The result is a fully functioning and accurate clock but one which defamiliarises the viewer from 'clock time', reminding us that this ever present measurement is itself simply human artifice. *Flipped Clock* gives us the opportunity to glimpse 'clock time' from the outside again.

The End is an intervention into HICA's picture window, where the words 'The End' are fixed onto the inside of the glass in a style and scale one would associate with the end credits of a movie. By the simplest means possible, the artists gently fictionalise the surrounding landscape by suggesting a sense of cinematic time overlaying the real-time view out of the window.

Thomson + Craighead's recent exhibitions include: *Impakt*, Utrecht, *A short film about war*, Centre of Contemporary Art, Glasgow, *Timecode*, Dundee Contemporary Arts, and *Untethered*, Eyebeam, New York.

<http://www.thomson-craighead.net>

This exhibition at HICA has been supported by the Henry Moore Foundation and the Scottish Arts Council.

It runs from 20 June – 25 July 2010, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum**<AbstractView>****18 September – 10 October**

<AbstractView>, an exhibition by Dutch artists Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum will open at the HICA art-space on Saturday 18 September, 2-5pm. The opening coincides with the Great Glen Artists' Airshow a major collaborative event presented by The Arts Catalyst and HICA.

For further details on The Great Glen Airshow please visit:
http://www.artscatalyst.org/projects/detail/great_glen_airshow/

Esther Polak's work examines how technology determines perception. She was one of the first artists to make large-scale art explorations using GPS (Global Positioning System) mapping. In her 2004 *MILK* project, Polak used GPS to trace European dairy transportation from a (Latvian) cow to a (Dutch) consumer. In Nigeria, she tracked nomadic herdsman, translating their journeys into drawings by means of a small robot tracing lines of sand. Collaborating with van Bakkum since 2004 their work continues to find new ways to explore the visualization of landscape and experience of space, by means of GPS technology.

During a short residency at HICA in 2009 Polak and van Bakkum developed their work for this exhibition, focusing on two basic forces that mould and interact with the landscape in very different ways: the grazing of sheep and the movements and rhythms of the wind. Working with a local farmer, they traced the interaction between a flock of sheep and a sheepdog using GPS devices. The results have then been interpreted and processed to produce an animated projection. The title of the exhibition, <AbstractView>, refers to a type of computer code (.kml) that the artists use to generate images, but also reflects on the images themselves and their relation to the original source of information.

Their projects demonstrate the forces that shape an environment. They provide insight into processes that occur over such long periods of time that they are otherwise difficult to experience, but the patterns created by the use of the latest technology also make comprehensible visualisations and tell human stories.

The artists will also contribute a free performance to The Great Glen Airshow, on Saturday 18 September, 2-5pm, where they will map air currents around Loch Ruthven by way of GPS tracking of large balloons.

Serendipitously, especially given the nature of their work, the artists were included in Google Streetview while engaged in their research at HICA. The page can be viewed by following this [link](#).

<AbstractView> has been supported by the Henry Moore Foundation and the Scottish Arts Council.

It runs from 18 September – 10 October 2010, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

The Arts Catalyst in association with HICA present:

The Great Glen Artists' Airshow

Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 September 2010

Adam Dant, Gair Dunlop, London Fieldworks, Alec Finlay, Susanne Norregard Nielsen, Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum, Camila Sposati, Louise K Wilson, Claudia Zeiske

Highland Institute for Contemporary Art (HICA), Dalcrombie, Loch Ruthven, Inverness-shire, IV2 6UA, UK, and Outlandia, Glen Nevis, Lochaber, Scotland, UK

The Great Glen is a huge natural fissure in the earth, encompassing Loch Ness and the Caledonian Canal. In September it will be the site for the Great Glen Artists' Airshow, with activities that redefine the air as medium taking place at either end of it. Previous Arts Catalyst artists airshows, in 2004 and 2007, involved artists flying objects or investigating aeronautical culture. In common with these earlier airshows movement through air and landscape will be explored. Yet this year's event will be more abstract, redefining the philosophical territory of the air and the ownership, or the mapping of the spatial landscape. This unique participatory weekend will take place on Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 September 2010 at HICA, Dalcrombie, Loch Ruthven and Outlandia, Glen Nevis, Lochaber, Scotland. Full details at www.artscatalyst.org

At one end of the Great Glen will be the main site, at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art (HICA), with activities taking place on nearby Loch Ruthven, in the woodlands and on the open brae, or fell. At the other end of the Glen will be the unique Utopian venture, Outlandia, a treehouse for artists in the sky, overlooking Ben Nevis. The two-day event should prove a unique, unusual and rewarding participatory art experience.

Saturday 18 September's free programme at HICA will include an airborne investigation of wind currents above Loch Ruthven by Dutch artists Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum. Polak will be extending her inventive use of global positioning (GPS) technology in her live performance beside the water. Her previous projects have seen her persuading long distance lorry drivers, cattle and sheep farmers in Nigeria, Brazil and Scotland to attach GPS units to vehicles and animals to trace patterns of migration and herding. Her recent work at InIVA, London, provoked viewers to rethink the way we map the world. An exhibition of new work by Esther Polak and Ivar van Bakkum continues at HICA until 10 October 2010.

Bruce Gilchrist and Jo Joelson of London Fieldworks will present new work, installed in the woodland behind the loch, which imagines the flight path of birds as augurs, or omens, part of an ancient tradition of divination by birds. This new project was made in collaboration with a former hunter turned bird guide in the Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest. London Fieldworks are also the creators of Outlandia, the destination of the Sunday bus tour event.

Passing through the woodland, the airshow's participants will encounter poet and artist Alec Finlay reading poems beneath a braeside wind turbine. Finlay, who has been undertaking a journey *The Road North* to create a 'world map of Scotland' has also been artist in residence at NAREC (the UK research establishment for sustainable energy).

The Brazilian artist Camila Sposati will create a vast smoke drawing across the horizon of the fell, tracing the landscape, perspectives and contours of the hills, in an ephemeral performance that dissolves into the ether.

Throughout the afternoon, there will be participatory flying of 'suprematist kites' by artist, Susanne Norregard Nielsen, suitable for those with kite-flying experience.

In the evening, following an Open Air meal, there will be a free programme of artists talks called 'The Territory of the Air' about the military/industrial and aerospace presence in remote places such as Scotland.

Artist, Louise K Wilson will discuss her Spadeadam project in which she attempted to trace the remains of Britain's cancelled space programme, Blue Streak
Gair Dunlop will provide insights into his photographic and video work relating to contemporary archaeology of the airfield and his forthcoming project at the nuclear reactor Dounreay
Esther Polak will talk about the implications and possibilities of increased civilian uses of GPS technologies
Claudia Zeiske, Director, Deveron Arts and cultural activist will talk about Walking and Art, in relation to Huntly's Walking Festival and the recent residency at Deveron arts by Hamish Fulton

On Sunday 19 September participants are invited to join a perambulatory bus tour of the Great Glen, conducted by artist Adam Dant, in conversation with The Arts Catalyst curator Rob La Frenais. This day-long event takes place along the length of the spectacular glen and will reveal unusual and possibly hidden aspects of Loch Ness and the Caledonian canal with the aid of a new 'aerial map' devised by Dant.

The climax of the journey will be the arrival at and the first public unveiling of Outlandia, the tree house for artists, which will be inhabited by Adam Dant in the manner of the Scottish enlightenment. Dant will be the first of many artists to transform the Utopian aerial studio, devised and designed by London Fieldworks as a long-term artists project for Fort William.

The Great Glen Artists' Airshow is a very special participatory weekend event. Capacity is limited so participants are asked to register and indicate when booking which events they will be taking part in - the Saturday daytime events, evening talks, open air meal (£10, £5 for children) and Sunday bus tour (£15 plus £10 lunch or £10 lunch only for those travelling independently).

Further information, travel and accommodation at www.artscatalyst.org online bookings at www.artistsairshow.eventbrite.com
enquiries admin@artscatalyst.org or 020 7375 3690 or 01808 521 306

Participants should be aware that some walking on steep, boggy and uneven ground at both Loch Ruthven and Glen Nevis will be needed to fully participate in the event. There will be some climbing over fences and up steep inclines - fitness and suitable clothing will be needed.

Supported by: Arts Council England, Scottish Arts Council, The Highland Culture Fund, The Henry Moore Foundation, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, H2007, Highland Council and Nevis Partnership, Brazilian Ministry of Culture, Brazilian Federation

Boyle Family: *Loch Ruthven***24 October – 28 November 2010**

An exhibition of new work by Boyle Family will open at HICA (the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art) on Sunday 24 October, 2-5pm.

For this exhibition the artists will undertake a contemporary archaeological study of the area surrounding the gallery. HICA, occupying a relatively remote site and something of a random location, provides an especially apt venue for this latest Boyle Family exhibition which references their Institute of Contemporary Archaeology, founded by Boyle and Hills in 1966, when they carried out their important event Dig.

HICA is an artist-run project and gallery located near Inverness in the Highlands of Scotland (www.h-i-c-a.org). Established in 2008, it aims to reassess the history of Concrete Art, a development of Constructivism, which presents artworks as objects in-themselves, while necessarily also seeing them within their context.

Presenting Boyle Family at HICA places their work in relation to this history, where it might exemplify one direction in which this work has evolved. Boyle Family's major contribution to British contemporary art, from early Assemblage pieces to their events, performances and Happenings of the 1960's and their later earth studies, manifest a desire to consider the significance of all parts of the physical environment.

From the global to the microscopic; animal, vegetable, mineral; sensory information, time and movement, random and structured interactions and involvements with the world, human beings; their biology and societies, all have been examined in their artwork's unique focus on the particular as part of the universal.

These projects, initially undertaken by Mark Boyle and his partner Joan Hills, developed as their children, Sebastian and Georgia, grew up and became increasingly involved. They have worked and exhibited together as Boyle Family for over thirty years, with major exhibitions in museums and galleries in Britain and abroad. Following the death of Mark Boyle in May 2005, Boyle Family continue to work and exhibit internationally.

Boyle Family are probably best known for their earth studies: three dimensional casts of the surface of the earth which record and document random sites with great accuracy. Their *World Series* project began in 1968 and took their concept of contemporary archaeology onto a global scale, with 1,000 randomly selected sites around the world. This project is ongoing, its overwhelmingly grand scale progressing through sites and museum exhibitions in Europe, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. The Sardinian project was the main focus of the Boyle Family British Pavilion exhibition at the 1978 Venice Biennale.

Their most recent *World Series* project, from the Hebridean island of Barra, is currently being shown at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. More information is available at: www.boylefamily.co.uk

The exhibition has been supported by the Henry Moore Foundation, the Scottish Arts Council, The Elephant Trust and the Hope Scott Trust.

Boyle Family at HICA runs from 24 October to 28 November 2010, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Richard Roth***Vernacular Modernism*****1 May – 5 June 2011**

Vernacular Modernism, an exhibition by the American artist Richard Roth, will open at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art on 1 May, 2011, 2-5pm.

Roth's practice combines Minimalist abstract painting with the curating and installation of collections of contemporary artifacts. For HICA, Roth will present a substantial installation of pieces from his collections.

Expanding on Minimalist ideology, these collections extend Roth's sense of reverence for ordinary objects and everyday culture. His focus in this he terms 'vernacular Modernism': the objects develop the often blunt and vulgar language of things, a language constructed by narratives around objects that are in continual flux. Though Roth asserts this language may also be "magical, poetic, vital, and sensual."

His collections investigate curatorial methodologies in contemporary art, where displayed objects may become artworks in their own right. Images from newspapers displaying grief, eye-shadow compacts, house-paint colour charts, paper targets for rifles and pistols, eight-inch by ten-inch business forms; each collection becomes an examination of cultural values, and while they are presented as neutrally as possible, Roth's exhibiting them suggests his choices and inclusions as both self-portrait and reflection of his own cultural landscape. Artists are then, he maintains, necessarily curators of their own unique museums of oddities and ephemera: considering what catches their eye, questioning the values this attention reveals.

His presenting these works at HICA prompts dialogue between geographical areas and local understandings, between the US and the UK. In the context of a now globalised contemporary art it aligns this vernacular 'language of things' with the universal language desired by Modernism, allowing space to reflect on the difference between these, and insight into both local and global value.

Roth is the co-editor of *Beauty is Nowhere: Ethical Issues in Art and Design* (G&B Arts International, 1998) and co-author, with Stephen Pentak, of *Color Basics* (Wadsworth, 2004).

His exhibitions include: Rocket Gallery, London; Penine Hart Gallery, Bess Cutler Gallery, Trans Hudson Gallery, New York; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Shillam + Smith, London; UCR/ California Museum of Photography; the Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, Japan; Feigen, Inc., Chicago; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Suburban, Oak Park, IL; and Reynolds Gallery, Richmond, VA.. He was the Director of Solvent Space in Richmond, Virginia, from 2005 – 2009.

He has taught at Ohio State University, New York University, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the University of California-Berkeley. He has been a visiting artist at Glasgow School of Art, and at the University of Central England, and is currently Professor in the Painting and Printmaking Department at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Vernacular Modernism has been supported by the Henry Moore Foundation. It runs from 1 May – 5 June, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Grow Together: Concrete Poetry in Brazil and Scotland**3 July – 7 August 2011**

Opening at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art on 3rd July, this exhibition includes works by some of the foremost concrete poets: The Noigandres Poets; Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari from Brazil; Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay from Scotland.

Concrete poetry developed through the 1950s and '60s. In these works conventional poetic structures are discarded in favour of exploring the graphic properties of words and their arrangement; the poems 'yield initiative to the words'. Setting aside literal meanings, concrete poetry finds common-ground between all languages. In this, it is inherently international in outlook.

As well as presenting individually important poems, such pivotal works as Augusto de Campos' *Tensão*, the exhibition, with adjacent works in English and Portuguese, examines this correspondence between languages as well as between language and equivalents in sound and music. It specifically reflects on the communication between poets of different nationalities and, in this context, on the effects of location on meaning. Consistent with this the location of HICA, as rural gallery and research project, enables an active presentation where elements such as Morgan's *Chaffinch Map of Scotland* or Pignatari's *Terra*, painted directly onto the gallery walls, make immediate connection to the context of the space and exhibition, and determine a current meaning.

Background to the concrete poetry movement, especially in Brazil, will be presented through related materials, including interviews with Augusto de Campos and a film by Michel Favre on the concrete artist Geraldo de Barros.

The exhibition's title, *Grow Together*, is from the Latin root of the word 'concrete'. Here, this etymology is particularly suggestive, of dialogue between geographically distant centres (Brazil and Scotland), or perhaps more pertinently, of the process of development of artworks and poems themselves: the process through which meaning finds form, exemplified in the exhibition by Haroldo de Campos' *Cristal Forma*.

In 1952, Augusto de Campos, with his brother Haroldo and Décio Pignatari, launched the literary magazine Noigandres, which initiated the Noigandres Group and the international movement of concrete poetry. The three also participated in, and helped create and organize, the First National Exhibition of Concrete Art in the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, 1956. Their works have since been included in many international exhibitions and anthologies, and they are individually recognised for their output in poetry, the very wide range of their translations and their numerous writings, as well as their own further artistic and poetic projects.

The late Edwin Morgan was one of the most important Scottish poets of the 20th century. In 2004, he was named as the first Scots Makar or Scottish national poet.

As well as being an artist of international importance Ian Hamilton Finlay was considered Britain's foremost concrete poet. Little Sparta, the garden he made at his home in the Pentlands, is internationally renowned.

Geraldo de Barros is one of the most notable artists of the Brazilian concrete movement. He made pioneering work in photography, as well as working in painting, print, graphics and industrial design. He was a founder and member of various artistic groups and associations, including the Ruptura Group, Gallery Rex, the cooperative furniture producers Unilabor and the furniture industry Hobjeto.

Grow Together: Concrete Poetry in Brazil and Scotland has been supported by the Henry Moore Foundation. It runs from 3 July – 7 August, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Concretely Immaterial

HICA + grey) (area

25 July - 11 September, 2011

This collaborative project will form an exhibition in two parts, showing at grey) (area space of contemporary and media art, Korčula, Croatia, from 25th July - 7th August, and HICA, the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art, Inverness-shire, Scotland, from 14th August - 11th September.

Artists showing at grey) (area will be Geoff Lucas (UK), Eloi Puig (Spain) and Thomson + Craighead (UK). Artists showing at HICA will be Samuel Cepeda (Mexico), Nina Czegledy (Canada) + Marcus Neustetter (South-Africa), Darko Fritz (Croatia / Netherlands), Andreja Kulunčić (Croatia), Edita Pecotić (Croatia / UK), Transfer (Croatia) and Goran Trbuljak (Croatia).

The exhibition explores the possible physical nature of thought and the 'virtual'. Virtual states and processes are variously employed in the artworks, especially through computer technology, though, in line with the title, *Concretely Immaterial*, the exhibition proposes these processes, as well as such things as the works' effects in the spaces of the galleries, and the experience of the viewers, as substantial and real. This sense is perhaps exemplified by Darko Fritz' presentation of the Internet error-message *204_NO_CONTENT*.

The collaborative form of the exhibition provides a framework for this exploration, as both galleries are at some distance from each other, and occupy what might be considered remote locations; viewers, it is expected, will experience the exhibition at least partly through technology or their imaginations.

The relation of physicality and thought is also explored in the works themselves: Samuel Cepeda's *Clouds have no Nation* parallels our knowledge of reality with the physical nature of clouds, a nature which science has difficulty in determining. Edita Pecotić's *Temporary Internet Files* are time-lapse videos of a transforming landscape that display various layers of information, both real and virtual. Nina Czegledy and Marcus Neustetter's book project, *Visual Collider*, refers to the Large Hadron Collider, the world's most powerful particle accelerator and the quantum effects it aimed to observe: analogous reactions are created for the viewer, prompting uncertain responses through juxtaposed imagery.

Time, as an essential aspect of this relation, is emphasized in works such as Andreja Kulunčić's examination of the people of Korčula's changing attitude to their city through history, or Geoff Lucas' animated text considering the paintings of Jackson Pollock and the concretization of individual actions in time and space.

The exhibition has been curated by Darko Fritz and HICA.

Concretely Immaterial, at HICA, has been supported by the Henry Moore Foundation. It will run at grey) (area, Korčula, Croatia, from 25 July - 7 August, and HICA, Inverness-shire, Scotland, from 14 August - 11 September.

The exhibition at HICA is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen

The Museum of Loss and Renewal: Loss Becomes Object

24 September – 30 October 2011

Loss Becomes Object, an exhibition by Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, in collaboration with The Highland Hospice, opens at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art on 24 September, 2-5pm, with an event including a series of talks, from 2-4pm, by Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen; a representative of The Highland Hospice; and Emma Nicolson, Director of ATLAS, followed by a preview of the exhibition from 4-5pm.

Creating environments that integrate art making and social engagement, for this project Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen focus on the interrelationships between death, memory, material culture and recycling. Through a period of engagement with The Highland Hospice Shops, and by working with artefacts donated to them, the artists investigate issues recurrent in their work; the value and significance of objects, life and death, and artist-led curatorial practice.

Re-presenting items such as clothes, music, videos, books and bric-a-brac, they question the value of 'things', and how they determine and reflect identities and histories. This inquiry follows on from work made in response to their own familial experiences of death, represented in work such as *Life is Over! if you want it.* (2009) and relates to a presentation given by the artists, that addressed the role that art can play in mediating issues of death and loss, as part of the Highland Hospice's conference, *The Space Between: making connections in palliative care.* (2009)

A new body of creative writing by Tracy Mackenna, developed with staff and volunteers of the Hospice shops, investigates the cultural and social status of the donated objects. Through conversation, eliciting stories relating to objects, Mackenna highlights their place in processes of loss, mourning and memory, and considers, with this group, the social and cultural relevance of the changing collections of objects under their guardianship.

The Museum of Loss and Renewal will be formed by two distinct exhibitions: *Loss Becomes Object* at HICA, and a second exhibition, in November 2011, at The Visual Research Centre, Dundee. Both exhibitions will extend and develop models of artist-led curatorial practice that situate at their core visual thinking and engagement with collections. Two public discussions, at HICA and the Visual Research Centre, will further explore the central subject through contributions by specialists from a range of disciplines. The entire project will be documented in a 2012 publication.

Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen have worked with a range of organisations and institutions to produce a variety of projects including *Ed and Ellis in Tokyo*, P3 Art and Environment, Nadiif, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Contemporary Art; *WAR IS OVER! if you want it*, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich; *Big City Small Talk*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; *Shotgun Wedding*, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh; *Ed and Ellis in Ever Ever Land*, CCA, Glasgow; The Merchant's House Garden, Fife Council (in partnership with Fife Historic Buildings Trust and Scottish Enterprise Fife), Kirkcaldy, Scotland; *Secrets are safe with us*, Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam / Artotheek South East Amsterdam; *I put my name on everything*, The Tron Theatre, Glasgow.

Loss Becomes Object has been supported by The National Lottery through Creative Scotland, The Henry Moore Foundation, The Carnegie Trust for The Universities of Scotland and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee. It runs from 24 September – 30 October, and is open on Saturdays and Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Doug Fishbone

Neither Here nor There

1 April – 6 May 2012

Neither Here nor There, an exhibition by Doug Fishbone, will open at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art on Sunday 1 April, 2012, 2-5pm.

Neither Here nor There brings together two recent video works by the London based conceptual artist Doug Fishbone that extend his examination of consumer culture, mass media and the relativity of perception and understanding. *Elmina* and *Untitled (Hypno Project)* both question the way information is processed and presented in the contemporary visual landscape, and undermine the relationship between audience, meaning and context in different ways.

Elmina, a new feature-length melodrama which was shot in Ghana with a cast of major Ghanaian celebrities and scripted by a leading local production team, offers an unexpected hybrid of the contemporary art world and the West African popular film industry. What allows it to cross over is the presence of Fishbone, a white man from New York, in the lead of an otherwise completely African film – a part that would normally be played by a black West African actor. No reference is made to this oddity of casting, which quietly challenges conventions of race and representation in film, and offers a new perspective on globalization and the possibility of a shared visual language. Released as both a limited edition art work for a Western art-world audience and an inexpensive DVD for mainstream African and African immigrant markets, *Elmina* upends conventional notions of value, authorship and celebrity, defying any single identity or reading.

Elmina had its world premiere at Tate Britain in 2010, and was recently shown as part of Dublin Contemporary and the exhibition *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989* at the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany.

In *Untitled (Hypno Project)*, twelve protagonists are filmed as they watch a short video under the influence of hypnosis, each having been given specific suggestions instructing them to respond in certain ways at different visual and aural cues. Their reactions to what they watch unfold with a curious but humourous tension, raising a broad range of questions about manipulation, propaganda and behavioral conditioning in our media-saturated visual and political environment. The project opens a window onto an alternate zone of consciousness and, as with *Elmina*, presents the possibility that a given work can operate on a number of different levels simultaneously – depending on who views and in what context.

Fishbone earned an MA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, London in 2003. Selected solo exhibitions include Tate Britain, London (2010-11), Rokeby, London (2010-11, and 2009), Gimpel Fils, London (2006) and 30,000 Bananas in Trafalgar Square (2004). Selected group exhibitions include *Rude Britannia: British Comic Art*, Tate Britain (2010), Busan Biennale, Busan, South Korea (2008); *Laughing in a Foreign Language*, Hayward Gallery (2008), London; *British Art Show 6*, Newcastle, Bristol, Nottingham and Manchester (2006). He performs regularly at both international and UK venues, including appearances at London's ICA and Southbank Centre.

Neither Here Nor There has been supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland and the Henry Moore Foundation. *Elmina* was made with the support of the Arts Council England.

The exhibition runs from 1 April – 6 May, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Eloi Puig*Simultaneous translation / Traducció simultània***8 July – 12 August 2012**

Simultaneous translation / Traducció simultània, an exhibition by Eloi Puig, will open at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art on Sunday 8 July, 2012, 2-5pm.

Throughout his work Puig considers whether language, and art, through their conceptual separation from reality, unavoidably manipulate ‘fact’. He specifically draws parallels between human bodies and minds, and the physical components of computers and the virtual states they create, asking whether the ‘language’ of computers might be similarly afflicted. To this end, his works have created corrupted computer data to be endlessly repeated, or randomly generating computer programmes with no input possible from the user. He has further incorporated manifestations of the real and fake, through such disparate sources as *Instants*, a poem purportedly written by Jorge Luis Borges, the fake pop group Milli Vanilli, and the TV documentary *Conspiracy Theory: Did We Land on the Moon?*

Puig’s show at HICA considers the relation of art and science and the difficulties in translating ideas from one to the other. By making a live connection from the physical and geographic location of HICA, to Hangar, a centre for arts production and research in Barcelona, the city in which Puig lives and works, he presents an equivalent dialogue through which ideas of translation may be explored.

A performance on the opening day (Sunday 8 July) will establish this dialogue, enacting various translations simultaneously between HICA and Hangar, via the internet: Photographic images and poetic texts directly related to each specific location will be variously encoded and deciphered, obtaining data sequences which, transmitted on-line, are presented as equivalents to the source materials’ DNA. An experiment in the unification of geographically distant points, the analysis of this ‘DNA’ further enables Puig to conduct a comparison of place as sequence alignment, following the scientific methods of bioinformatics and computational genomics. The comparison will generate new ways of seeing and understanding the source materials, as image and information, and explore the reality of concurrency as something disruptive to our individual sense of personal narrative, and our narratives of place.

A specialist in computer-art and digital printing, Puig is Professor in the Department of Painting at the University of Barcelona, and a member of the Imarte research group. He held a postdoctoral research fellowship at the Akademie der Künste München Bildenden, through 2008, and his exhibitions include Gallery Ferran Cano (Palma de Mallorca and Barcelona), I8 (Reykjavik), I.Bongard (Paris), Cavecanem (Seville), with other audiovisual projects including the CGAC (Santiago de Compostela), SonarCinema at CCCB, Mostra d’Arts Electroniques 2000, and CASM (Barcelona).

Simultaneous translation / Traducció simultània has been supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland and The Henry Moore Foundation.

The exhibition runs from 8 July – 12 August, and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Daniel Spoerri*Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri***2 September – 7 October 2012**

Opening at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art on Sunday 2 September, 2-5pm, this exhibition explores the work of Daniel Spoerri in relation to Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri his sculpture garden, located near Seggiano, Tuscany.

Born in 1930, Spoerri is a major figure in European post-war art: he was a key member of the Darmstadt Circle of concrete poets, a founder member of the Nouveaux Réalistes and closely associated with the Fluxus movement. He is best known for his ‘snare’ or ‘trap’ pictures, which he began making in 1959. These works present groups of objects “in chance positions, in order or disorder”, such as all the remains of a meal. The objects are fixed exactly as they are found, on the surface they lie. These assemblages are then displayed on the wall as pictures: “gluing together situations that have happened accidentally so that they stay together permanently”. In 1967 he opened the Restaurant Spoerri in Düsseldorf, where he developed what he termed Eat Art. Upstairs from this, in 1970, he opened the Eat-Art-Gallery. His continued explorations developed series’ of assemblage works, with some becoming bronze sculptures, the bronze employed as a further method of permanent fixing, unifying the disparate materials of the assemblages.

In the early 1990s he moved to the village of Seggiano, close to the densely wooded slopes of Monte Amiata, the highest mountain in Tuscany. Here he began work on his sculpture garden, and Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri opened in 1997. It now contains works by fifty artists, including Arman, Karl Gerstner, Nam June Paik, Dieter Roth, Jean Tinguely and Eva Aeppli, as well as works by Spoerri himself, with over a hundred installations in all.

Spoerri chose a motto he had seen at the castle of Oiron, *Hic Terminus Haeret*, which can be translated as ‘the end (or rather, in this case, ‘transition’) sticks here’, to be placed above the gates to the Giardino. This maxim then makes a thematic connection with the method of his snare-pictures, expanding the sense from these to encompass the ongoing life of the garden.

The exhibition, *Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri*, at HICA, will explore how this constant concern with the processes of formation manifests in the garden, with context and historical background to Spoerri’s work provided through specific texts, bookworks and concrete poems.

A series of photographs and randomly selected objects and plants from the Giardino highlight the link between the garden and Spoerri’s concerns. Their particular placement within the gallery necessarily reflects also on the context of the exhibition, and of HICA.

Through highlighting the Giardino’s, and HICA’s, rural and remote locations, the exhibition further prompts reflection on the random-seeming, but highly-specific nature of exact results and location, mirroring and expanding on the concerns of the works themselves. The exhibition intends this purposeful development of the contexts, making connection between the Giardino and HICA for the duration of the show. This also achieves a degree of permanence, as some of the objects from the Giardino will be added to HICA’s own garden at the end of the exhibition.

Daniel Spoerri: Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri has been made possible through the assistance of Il Giardino di Daniel Spoerri Foundation, and has been supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland and The Henry Moore Foundation.

The exhibition runs from 2 September – 7 October and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Camila Sposati*Green-Dyed Vulture***14 October – 18 November 2012**

Green-Dyed Vulture, an exhibition by the Brazilian artist Camila Sposati, will open at the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art on Sunday 14 October, 2-5pm.

The exhibition's title is a quote from the Brazilian poet Mário Quintana, describing our human desire to repress or embellish an unwanted truth: a vulture dressed in the colour of hope, is still a vulture. Sposati shares the poet's sentiment, seeing the best possible world as one that contains the possibility of another, immanent within it. This sense reflects the artist's view of her own working methods and on the works in this exhibition: she explores processes of transformation, aiming to 'allow something invisible to become evident'.

To pursue this, Sposati has researched transformative processes on microscopic and global scales, growing crystals in laboratories or studying geological effects in the Earth's crust; research that has taken her to sites in Amazonia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Guatemala, Europe and Japan. She has been supported by organisations, including the Brazilian Ministry of Culture; Petrobrás; the British Council; University College London; The Arts Catalyst; the Royal Geological Survey; Tokyo Wonder Site; Montehermoso, Spain, and the International Residency programme at Recollets, France.

Her explorations focus on revealing relations between colour and shape in dynamic systems and investigating our experiential responses: the works' multi-sensory aspects and our conceptual understandings. Here her work may be seen within the Neo-concrete traditions of Brazilian art. Sposati's investigations develop the concerns of Hélio Oiticica (the artist most prominent in Neo-Concretism), with 'activating the relationship between the subject and the work in real time', engaging their surroundings and audience, and seeking a 'primal experience of the real', through shape and colour.

These concerns have widened her view to include cultural and anthropological understandings of the forms she explores. Visits to sites of man-made sinkholes such as Darvaza, in Turkmenistan, or Guatemala City have led her to consider the essential discourse she observes between geological processes, the civilizations that inhabit these regions and the artefacts they produce.

One of three new works in this exhibition, *Unlock* (2012) is a direct response to her research in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, travelling along the ancient Silk Road. The piece, a print, hung on a wall and tied to the ground by two stones, shows a cartographic image of the earth. Reflecting the fabrics and tapestries of the nomadic cultures she encountered, it describes the fragility of a body in constant movement and in unpredictable patterns; our experience of gravity and magnetism.

Relating also to the exhibition's title, its circular movement mirrors the flight of vultures, balancing between air currents and gravity, finding the point of greatest economy of energy. It is this point that holds most fascination for Sposati, and is echoed throughout her work; through circular forms and patterns or through a focus on the conservation of energy through transformative processes.

Green-Dyed Vulture has been supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland and The Henry Moore Foundation.

The exhibition runs from 14 October – 18 November and is open on Sundays 2 - 5pm, or by appointment.

Liam Gillick*From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven:
Courtyard Housing Projections***Exhibition: 1 September – 6 October 2013****(Residency: 14 April – 6 October 2013)**

From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections, Liam Gillick's ongoing residency project with the Highland Institute for Contemporary Art, will open to the public on Sunday 1 September, 2-5pm, and continue as a developing exhibition until 6 October.

Gillick's residency takes as its starting point a consideration of two important low-rise high density housing projects. The first is Jørn Utzon's Fredensborg Housing (1963) in Zealand, Denmark. The second is Atelier 5's Halen Estate (1957-1961) near Berne in Switzerland.

Both these projects sited high-density walled housing within natural landscape. They function both as experimental housing models and abstract forms in their own right.

For the residency Liam Gillick will work from ground plans of twenty important buildings from the twentieth century. From these plans he will extrude new low rise forms that will exist as new formal abstraction and massing studies for future potential high density structures.

The work will be carried out over the summer of 2013 in various locations, ranging from Texas to Scandinavia, including a stay at HICA to photograph and research the local landscape.

A series of axonometric projections will be produced as a record of the project.

Gillick's work over the last twenty years has frequently focused upon the semiotics of the built world – examining structures that were proposed as "functional utopias" and producing revised forms that accentuate the aspects of attempted development with particular focus upon revision, renovation and attempts to control the near future and the recent past.

Nominated for the Turner Prize (2002) and Vincent Award (2008) his numerous exhibitions include the Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; 8th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai, with solo exhibitions including The Whitechapel Gallery, London (2002); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2005); and German Pavilion, Venice Biennale (2009). His works are held in many collections, including Arts Council, UK; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Tate, London.

From Fredensborg to Halen via Loch Ruthven: Courtyard Housing Projections has been supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland and The Henry Moore Foundation.

The exhibition runs from 1 September – 6 October and will be open on Sundays 2-5pm, or by appointment.

Appendix B

As noted at the end of section 3.37, our original plan for the *Grow Together: Concrete Poetry in Brazil and Scotland* exhibition had been for a survey show of concrete poetry from the two countries, especially focussing on works by Augusto de Campos, in what was his 80th year. This was to be a collaboration with curators, João Bandeira and Lenora de Barros, based in São Paulo. As a part of this I was asked to send a list of possible questions, a selection from which might then be put to de Campos in a filmed interview. As earlier noted this whole plan was changed, due to a lack of support for the project, with the interview being one casualty of this. I was still able to have an e-mail dialogue with de Campos through which he sent a brief written response as a reply to my questions overall. Further to this, alongside his permission for inclusion of works in the show, he sent several other documents including past interviews that he felt contained relevant and useful answers, as well as copies of the first correspondence between Ian Hamilton Finlay, Mary Ellen Solt and himself.

Items included here:

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| B.1 | Augusto de Campos: interview questions and response | 400 |
| B.2 | Copies of documents forwarded by Augusto de Campos: First letters between Augusto de Campos, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Mary Ellen Solt. | 405 |
| B.3 | Concrete Poetry Manifesto, Augusto de Campos, 1956 | 410 |

Further items sent as inclusions in the exhibition:

- Past interviews with Augusto de Campos:
Hans Ulrich Obrist, 2003
Roland Greene, 1992
Yale Symposium on Experimental, Visual and Concrete Poetry since the 1960s
- Poem-object series: *Poemóviles*, Augusto de Campos and Julio Plaza, re-issued, 2010
- Geraldo de Barros: Sobras em Obras*. Film by Michel Favre, 1999.
- Poesia Concreta: o projeto verbivocovisual*. Publication by J. Bandeira, & L. de Barros, 2008

Grow Together exhibition

HICA 3rd July – 7th August 2011

Potential interview questions for Augusto de Campos:

In your Pilot Plan of 1958 you, your brother Haroldo and Décio Pignatari, writing as the Noigandres group of poets, describe Concrete Poetry as ‘tension of things-words in space-time.’ I wonder if you could expand on that – to describe how these poems function?

You also mention in the Pilot Plan a list of precursors, suggesting origins in poets and writers such as Mallarmé, Joyce and Pound, or the Brazilians de Andrade and de Melo Neto as well as in, to quote, ‘Concrete Art in general’, with Mondrian, Max Bill and Albers as examples.

In retrospect, do any elements of the conceived form or origins of Concrete Poetry seem more, or less essential? That is, does the Pilot Plan still seem correct, comprehensive?

I’m very curious about the split that frequently seems to occur between mathematical and ‘cold’ approaches and the more intuitive and emotional in the area of Concrete Art. It seems to have led to various divisions in groups, the Allianz Group in Switzerland for instance, as I understand, finding difficulty between Constructivist and Art Informel tendencies.

Was this also the case in Brazil? I believe the Noigandres poets worked closely with the Ruptura and also Frente groups of artists? Did a similar split within these then lead to the forming of the Neo-Concretists?

I’d wonder if there might be discerned different tendencies between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in this, perhaps through the character of the places, or their inhabitants? – the impression I have is that the São Paulo poets and artists tended to maintain a more wholly Constructivist outlook?

Would you think its something in a person’s character that might attract them to one or another side of this? Would it reflect just personal taste or does this taste

indicate something more profound – a sense of geometry and a view on the nature of reality?

Did your temperament draw you to Concrete Poetry – could you describe its particular appeal in this way to you: was it allied to a sense of a philosophical or theoretical truth?

Was there a sense you shared with your brother Haroldo and Décio Pignatari, enough to identify a common approach and a new way of working between you? How close was this?

How much is a philosophical or theoretical outlook also determined by the environment – the culture at the time?

Despite any more local differences, was there something about Brazil in the early 1950’s that made it the right time and place for Concrete Poetry?

The positive social intention of architects such as Neimeyer would have been part of the immediate cultural context – did their utopian visions also contribute to the understanding and development of your poetry?

Differing tendencies as the result of different characters and attitudes would also make me reflect on the development of Concrete Poetry in other parts of the world: individuals and groups who may or may not have allied themselves at all with a Constructivist outlook.

Considering Concrete Poetry in Scotland for example, how do you feel these inclinations manifested in the works of Ian Hamilton Finlay and Edwin Morgan?

Can you remember whether there was close discussion with them on points around the poetic, literary, political, philosophical, etc.?

Alec Finlay, Ian Hamilton Finlay’s son, has recalled how often, in his growing up, such things as stones in the garden were termed ‘poem-objects’, something I would understand as being dependent on a perceived resonance of the form. This might highlight, as an example, quite different intentions, say, from your

own poem-objects – which do seem much more, both physically and mentally, constructed?

Despite a certain desire for objectivity that could be construed from ‘things-words in space-time’, there still seems often the very strongly identifiable imprint of the poems’ authors - thinking of even between Hamilton Finlay and Morgan, and the sense around their individual poetry.

There is a quote from Edwin Morgan I like which I think is also very interesting around a sense of objectivity, he says: ‘the concrete poem isn’t meant to be something you would come across as you turned the pages of a book. (Most concrete poems still are, but that is not the ideal.) It would rather be an object that you passed every day on your way to work, to school or factory or office: it would be in life, in space, concretely there.’

In considering how elements in artworks may be understood as autonomous I’ve wondered about the often opposite apparent intentions in the suggestion of objectivity: there seems the kind of objectivity, expressed here by Morgan, as objecthood, a separation from a usual perceived meaning and an equality and closer identification with surroundings, and elsewhere an attempted separation and distinction from the immediate surroundings, as in ideal mathematical forms.

I’d wonder how you understand autonomy and objectivity to work in Concrete Poetry, the relation to context, and whether your views in this area have changed at all over the years?

Describing works as Concrete, for me, goes to the heart of various theoretical difficulties in art-making – between form and content, the general and the particular, between presentation and representation. Seeing works as Concrete appears to prompt universal meanings (in formal properties: colour, scale, placing etc.) but also stress the importance of the concrete form as a unique thing in-itself. Mondrian’s work, for instance, could be seen as all about the balancing of this opposition. Would you have a view on this state, and how these aspects balanced in Concrete Poetry?

Can you think of other artists or poets that, to your mind, find a particularly good

way to resolve, or work with, these difficulties?

There seems an end-point to the Concrete Poetry project, around 1970. I’d like to just ask a few questions about the progress of ideas since this time.

I’d wonder about the diminishing general awareness of Concrete Art and Poetry since that period, and your opinions on a few thoughts and observations:

Hélio Oiticica stated a desire to activate ‘the relationship between the subject and the work in real time’. Would you feel this was also part of Concrete poetry’s intention?

From this desire there appears in Oiticica’s work the trajectory away from fixed objects to more performative works. Again, I’d wonder if this direction may have also influenced developments around Concrete Poetry – perhaps pushing it to explore new and different media and technologies?

Do you think that Concrete Poetry in some ways achieved its goals and no longer needs positive identification? Has the work of the concrete poets helped create a new environment – i.e. in computing, design, advertising – where we are more constantly engaged with ‘the concrete’ as part of everyday language, that is, in this way, do we inhabit today a more ‘concrete’ world than in the 1950’s?

I have observed, I think, that the division into these two approaches in Concrete works, the more rational and mathematically, or irrational and emotionally inclined, have been able to be reconciled to an extent more recently, perhaps through discoveries in mathematics of more complex geometry, the ‘geometry of nature’-leading to understandings of more chaotic forms. Or at least the two sides in this division have found ways of working with the other’s material: mathematical chaos – again this seems now something that is just part of the culture, a common-sense - is this development something you have observed, or have found in your own work?

Geoff Lucas, January 2011

Extract from e-mail from Augusto de Campos, as general response to my questions:

The poem TENSÃO [TENSION], 1956, clearly illustrates the concept synthesized in the phrase “concrete poetry: tension of things-words in space-time”. In fact, it was extracted from my previous manifesto, published in 1956, in the magazine “AD - Art and Decoration,” launched simultaneously to the “1ª EXPOSIÇÃO NACIONAL DE ARTE CONCRETAT” [1st NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF CONCRETE ART at the Museum of Modern Art - MAM of São Paulo, December 1956. In that sentence I alluded to an expression of Jean Paul Sartre, who had claimed in “Situations III” that poetry distinguishes from prose by the fact that in poetry words are things, while in prose they are signs. Hence the term thing-word, which emphasises the materiality of the word - not only in its meaning but in its visual and sound dimensions - its “verbivocovisual” entirety (“verbivocovisual”, a neologism taken from Joyce’s FINNEGANS WAKE, one of the basic references of Brazilian concrete poetry). “Space-time” obviously refers to modern physics and the concept of relativity, in that it stresses the interpenetration of space and time in the text. TENSÃO can be read from any point, and its own theme (sound /no-sound) implies a tension between the temporal reading and the spatial presentation of the written word, music and painting. The very structure of the poem with words placed in virtual squares suggests an ambiguity between two and three dimensions. It was this emphasis on the materiality of the word (which does not exclude its meaning), and this ambivalence between time and space, that the quoted phrase sought to catch, and that, of course, can be better understood in the context of the theoretical texts of concrete poetry.

A. de Campos, May 2011

concrete poetry - augusto de campos (1956)

- concrete poetry begins by assuming a total responsibility before language.
- accepting the purpose of the historical idiom as the indispensable nucleus of communication, it refuses to absorb words as mere indifferent vehicles, without life, without personality, without history — tabu-tombs in which convention insists on burying the idea.
- the concrete poet does not turn away from words, he does not glance at them obliquely: he goes directly to their center, in order to live and vivify their facticity.
- the concrete poet sees the word in itself — a magnetic field of possibilities— like a dynamic object, a live cell, a complete organism, with psycho-physico-chemical properties, touch antennae circulation heart: live.
- far from attempting to evade reality or to deceive it, concrete poetry is against self-debilitating introspection and simpleton's simplistic realism.
- It intends to place itself before things, open, in a position. of absolute realism.
- the old formal, syllogistic-discursive foundation, strongly shaken at the beginning of the century, has served again as a prop for the ruins of a compromised poetic, an anachronistic hybrid with an atomic heart and a medieval carcass.
- against perspectivistic syntactic organization where words sit like “corpses at a banquet,” concrete poetry offers a new sense of structure, capable of capturing without loss or regression the contemporaneous essence of poeticizable experience.
- mallarmé (un coup de dés--1897), joyce (finnegans wake), pound (cantos-ideogram), cummings, and on a secondary plane, apollinaire (cailigrammes) and the experimental attempts of the futurists-dadaists are at the root of the new poetic procedure which tends to impose itself on a conventional organization whose formal unity is the verse (even free verse).
- the concrete poem or ideogram becomes a relational field of functions.
- the poetic nucleus is no longer placed in evidence by the successive and linear chaining of verses, but by a system of relations and equilibriums between all parts of the poem.
- graphic-phonetic functions«relations» (“factors of proximity and likeness) and the substantive use of space as an element of composition maintain a simultaneous dialectics of sight and voice, which, allied with the ideogrammic synthesis of meaning, creates a sentient «verbivocovisual» totality. In this way words and experience are juxtaposed in a tight phenomenological unit impossible before.
- CONCRETE POETRY: TENSION OF THINGS-WORDS IN SPACE-TIME

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